

Ready for change

First session of the 61st Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick

The Honourable Brenda Murphy, Lieutenant-Governor



Monarch | Tara Francis





Speech from the Throne

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Opening Remarks

Madame Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests, and fellow New Brunswickers, welcome to the opening of the first session of the 61st Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick.

We respectfully acknowledge the territory on which we gather as the ancestral, unceded homelands of the Wolastoqey, Mi'gmaq and Peskotomuhkati people.

We congratulate the Honourable Susan Holt on becoming New Brunswick's 35th Premier and we welcome to this chamber all the newly elected members and those returning to serve their constituents here in the legislature.

While there is much to be grateful for in our beautiful province, your communities face many significant challenges, including access to health care, finding affordable housing, and ensuring kids have the opportunities they need to thrive.

Our province is full of resilient, creative, and compassionate people who are ready to tackle those challenges head on, people who believe that by working together, we can build a brighter future. To do this, we need to be bold and collaborative and to address these challenges in fresh new ways.

We have already taken a step in that direction, by electing the province's first woman premier. This is a historic moment for New Brunswick, and it is just the beginning. New Brunswickers are ready for change, and your government is ready to change with you.

As we start today's session, we want to take a moment to recognize some of the inspirational people and groups who are making positive change across our province.

Congratulations / Recognition

Several New Brunswickers have had noteworthy recognition and achievements over the past year.

Ten New Brunswickers have been invested into the Order of New Brunswick. The 2023 inductees were: Catherine Akagi, from Saint Andrews; J.W. Bud Bird, from Fredericton; Isabelle McKee-Allain, from Dieppe; Joanne E. McLeod, from Fredericton; and Bernard Poirier, from Dieppe. The 2024 inductees are: Kassim Doumbia, from Shippagan; Carmen Gibbs, from Grand-Bouctouche (district of Saint-Thomas de Kent); John Leroux, from Fredericton; Robert K. Irving, from Moncton; and Karen O. Taylor, from Woodstock.

Congratulations to the New Brunswick lawyers who have been appointed to the King's Counsel.

We congratulate Olivier Hussein of Dieppe, who was selected by Francopresse as one of the 10 Most Influential Personalities in the Canadian Francophonie 2023.

Congratulations to the nine recipients of the Excellence in Education Awards for the francophone sector for 2023 and the 10 educators who received the 2024 Excellence in Education Awards for the anglophone sector.

Congratulations to the 10 recipients of the second annual Étincelles awards, which recognize innovative practices and efforts to create learning environments that help students lead balanced lives, develop a lifelong desire for learning and become ethical and engaged citizens.

We congratulate Maude Cyr-Deschênes of Edmundston who won the 10th season of la Voix-TVA – The Voice.

Congratulations to Dave Durepos and Sabrina Durepos, who were inducted into the 2024 Wheelchair Basketball Canada Hall of Fame.

We honour the winners of the 2024 Disability Awareness Week Awards, including the winner of the Honourable Andy Scott Award – Dr. Shawn Jennings; Christine Evans, winner of the Employer Award; provincial individual award winner Kourtney Stevenson and provincial organization award winner Moncton Community Residences Inc.

Le Pays de la Sagouine was the New Brunswick winner of the Quebec-New Brunswick Innovation and Marketing Award at the ninth Rendez-vous Acadie-Québec.

Congratulations to the seven top-performing exporters who received awards at the 56th annual Export Awards in May – JessEm Tool Company, GAP Auto, Smartskin Technologies, Anessa, Let's Nurture, Bulletproof, and Corruven.

We honour Citizen's Hero Award recipients Corey Proctor and Rick Burgess, who were recognized by the Sussex Fire Department for their heroic actions in approaching the scene of a structure fire to save and protect a fellow community member.

We congratulate the New Brunswick athletes, coaches, officials and staff who took part in the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris. Congratulations to the two Paralympic athletes who brought home medals: Alexandre Hayward of Quispamsis who won bronze in cycling and Danielle Dorris of Moncton who won gold in swimming.

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2024 New Brunswick Human Rights Awards: Rendez-vous de la fierté Acadie Love, the recipient of the Human Rights Award, and Merrit Johnson of Fredericton, the recipient of the Youth Human Rights Award.

We congratulate Louis-Philippe Albert of Fredericton and Armand Doucet of Dieppe, who were invested in the Order of Canada in 2024.

Congratulations to Tara Francis, a Mi'kmaq artist from Elsipogtog First Nation, who received the first Indigenous Artist Award as part of the Lieutenant Governor's Award for High Achievement in the Arts.

Finally, congratulations to the record number of women elected to the New Brunswick legislature. Our province made history with 17 women, including the first woman of colour and immigrant, the first female francophone speaker, and the first woman premier of New Brunswick, elected in this most recent provincial election.

Condolences

We also pause to remember those we have lost in the past year.

We were saddened by the passing of Noël Kinsella, a champion of human rights who served as a member of the Canadian Senate and as its Speaker for many years.

We mourn the loss of the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney, Canada's 18th prime minister, who will be remembered for his commitment and service to our country.

We honour Gifford Cooke, co-founder of Cooke Aquaculture, who, along with his children, grew the seafood company to achieve international success, while remaining rooted in New Brunswick.

Former MLA and cabinet minister Susan Stultz, affectionately known as the Turkey Lady, was a dedicated volunteer who will be remembered for her impact on her community and the province.

We remember Arthur L. Irving, chairman emeritus and former president of Irving Oil for his endless energy and dedication to business and community.

We remember Senator Joseph A. Day for his kindness, wisdom and commitment to serving New Brunswickers.

We were saddened by the loss of Réginald Charles Gagnon, better known as Cayouche, an Acadian country singer-songwriter.

We honour Marcel-Romain Thériault, a prominent actor and director who was well known for his many roles in theatre and television.

We remember distinguished actor Donald Sutherland, who was born in Saint John.

We honour James K. Irving, the Chairman of J.D. Irving, Limited, who leaves an enduring legacy through his contributions to his community and the province.

We were saddened by the loss of Acadian singer-songwriter Paul Dwayne.

We remember Mario LeBlanc, better known as Fayo, an Acadian folk-rock singer-songwriter.

We were saddened by the recent passing of retired senator Murray Sinclair, an Indigenous lawyer and judge who served as chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2009 to 2015. His work challenged all of us to do better and commit to the act of reconciliation.

Introduction

In many ways, today marks a fresh start for our province – one that will have collaboration, transparency, and a renewed sense of possibility as its foundation.

Your government understands that trust does not come easy, but they are ready and willing to work hard to earn it. The members gathered here today represent New Brunswickers across the province and have been sent to this chamber to amplify their voices and to ensure that each has the support and services they need.

Health care and affordability are critical as far too many New Brunswickers struggle to access primary care and make ends meet. Your government is tackling these pressing issues head-on and will continue to do so in the coming months and years.

Your government has already hit the ground running with many of your key priorities that will be completed within their first 100 days, including removing the provincial sales tax off home electricity, implementing a rent cap, and scrapping the clean fuel adjustor to make life more affordable, addressing the housing crisis by taking provincial tax off multi-unit builds and showing New Brunswick nurses the respect and appreciation they deserve through retention payments.

Trust is built not only through what is done but in how it is done.

Your government will “get out of the office” and connect authentically with New Brunswickers, communities, stakeholders, and experts inspired by the disability advocacy principle of “Nothing about us without us”.

It recognizes that one size does not fit all – that some communities will need different things to thrive and our legislation, policies and programs should be designed to support those unique differences.

Today your government lays out how it will improve life for New Brunswickers, both in the long-term approach it will take to help tackle our province’s challenges and by including measurable short-term commitments that will be carried out in the first year of its mandate.

Government Priorities

To address the challenges we face, your government has identified six priority areas. These are:

- Health Care
- Affordability and Housing
- Education
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Trusted Leadership

Under each of these areas, measurable goals will be set to ensure their progress is timely, transparent and will have a positive impact.

Health Care

COMMUNITY CARE

Your government believes that every New Brunswicker should have access to the care they need, close to home, when they need it. In order to make that a reality, they will improve our health-care system to ensure that it is accessible, flexible, and equipped with the right tools and teams to serve the people of this province.

Too many New Brunswickers continue to be without a doctor. To help ensure better access to care, over the next four years, your government will establish and support at least 30 community care clinics that offer local, collaborative care from a variety of health professionals. Dedicated non-clinical staff and administrative support will also be a part of this collaborative care model to ensure that health professionals can focus on patients rather than paperwork.

Your government has committed to support 10 community care clinics in 2025, in Fredericton, Moncton, Saint John, Edmundston, Campbellton, Carleton North, the Acadian Peninsula, St. Stephen, Sussex, and Sackville. The government will also be targeting clinics in Woodstock, the Kennebecasis Valley, Blacks Harbour, and Blackville into 2026.

Your government will be a willing partner – if communities build a plan to transform their clinic into a collaborative community care clinic, they will support them.

In order to further improve access to care, your government will increase the time that operating rooms are open to ensure hospitals across the province are used to their fullest potential.

They will invest in modern technology, including centralized waitlists and connected digital records management systems, to ensure the seamless and secure exchange of patient information between health-care professionals so that all of your information is in one place and you aren't required to tell your story over and over again.

HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS

Your government is committed to care for the people who care for New Brunswickers, including doctors, nurses and the many health-care professionals who are working so hard to overcome obstacles in a system that isn't working.

A Health Human Resourcing plan will be developed in collaboration with health-care professionals to improve working conditions, prioritize support for wellness, and increase retention of those who are already hard at work.

As they explore other tools to aid retention and recruitment, your government's first step will be retaining the nurses caring for New Brunswickers today with recognition and retention payments. The payments of \$10,000 will go to all nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses working in the public hospital and long-term care system with a second cheque of \$5,000 following next year.

Your government will work with communities and experts to ensure local realities are not only respected but included in any plan to retain and recruit health-care professionals.

Your government will overhaul the compensation model for doctors and primary care providers to align with team-based collaborative care clinics. This will include fair pay for those who provide care after hours.

Your government will also ensure more doctors are trained by working with Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick and the Centre de formation médicale du Nouveau-Brunswick to create more training and residency seats, with the first 10 seats being added in the 2025-26 academic year.

Your government will work to find creative approaches to recruit health-care professionals. This will include working with regulators to improve recognition of foreign credentials for nurses, doctors, and other health-care professionals.

A review and expansion of the scope of practice for health-care professionals will also be carried out so that they have the ability to work to their full capacity as they were trained.

SENIORS

It is important that seniors and their families have options and the ability to make choices about their care with dignity.

To help achieve this goal, your government will further expand the Nursing Home Without Walls model over their mandate to the 55 homes not yet included in the program to ensure that those who want to stay home can do so for as long as possible.

Your government will fill staffing gaps to ensure all nursing home beds are accessible to those who need one and so that no one has to live in a hospital while they wait. They will do this by investing in wages for personal support workers and resident attendants to increase hours of care.

Support for seniors will also come through investment in increased wages for homecare workers, comfort and clothing allowances, and in a monthly caregiving benefit for those caring for aging family members.

As well, they will provide the RSV vaccine for free to seniors and vulnerable people.

UNDERSERVED AND VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

While accessing primary health care is a challenge for all New Brunswickers, this is especially true for historically underserved groups.

Your government is taking steps to change that.

They will invite First Nations leaders to create a bilateral forum and ongoing process to achieve culturally safe and equitable health care for Indigenous people in the province.

As well, they will support, collaborate, and engage with First Nations health-care leaders to achieve their Health Transformation design and implementation process.

Your government will ensure the billing process aligns with best practices to provide members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community with quality health and mental health care. This includes longer appointment times and gender-affirming care.

They will increase access to fertility treatments by funding one round of IVF and will expand midwifery services and allocate funding to support training and education.

They will make contraception free.

They will implement at-home pap tests for cervical cancer screening.

Your government has already approved regulatory changes to 84-20 in the *Medical Services Payment Act* to allow Medicare to cover the cost of surgical abortions provided in approved facilities outside hospitals. Though they recognize that this alone cannot immediately create better access to abortion, it is an important first step. Moving forward, they will work with stakeholders like the New Brunswick Medical Society and regional health authorities to establish how these services will be delivered in communities.

MENTAL HEALTH

Improving access to mental health care that is accessible, compassionate, and supportive when people need it is a priority for your government. They will reduce wait times by including mental health professionals in as many community care clinics as possible. This will not only make certain that mental health is treated as primary care, it will also reduce the frequency of acute mental health challenges.

An increase in residency seats for psychiatrists and clinical psychologists and development of a retention and training plan for psychologists, counsellors, and other mental health professionals, specifically within schools, will help build the workforce necessary to support the growing need for mental health services.

Your government will invest in community-based management approaches for front-line service providers who are currently providing mental health support across the province, with 15 grants slated to be granted in 2025 and more to follow.

They will create a Mental Health Advocate position so that New Brunswickers struggling with mental health and navigating the system have a champion.

Access to mental health court will be expanded to ensure the promotion of alternative pathways for justice so that people are getting the support they need. This will reduce the rate of people re-entering the justice system.

They will partner with First Nations to co-create and implement mental health and addiction programs that meet culturally safe First Nation service and practice standards of care.

Your government will also invest in treatment beds throughout the province. This will ensure that there is a bed available for anyone who wants it when they want it, and that there is an optional continuum of care for those exiting treatment.

Affordability and Housing

AFFORDABILITY

New Brunswickers are struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living as the price for things like gas, power, and rent continue to go up. Your government is committed to making your life more affordable through targeted measures that will make a meaningful difference in your day-to-day life.

To help ease the costs of groceries and to ensure students are able to learn, your government will provide a nutritious universal free breakfast and pay-what-you-can lunches to all New Brunswick students. This will be done by leveraging local food where possible.

They will provide a rebate equivalent to the 10 per cent sales tax from your electricity bill. This rebate will be delivered by NB Power, and the three municipal electricity providers in the province, and available to all residential customers who pay HST on their electricity bills. No application will be required.

During this fall's legislative session, they will introduce amendments to the *Petroleum Products Pricing Act* to remove the cost of the carbon adjuster component from the weekly adjusted price of gas, which will save New Brunswickers around four cents a litre at the pumps.

HOUSING

While New Brunswick welcomes the record population growth we are experiencing, we must deal with the impacts that come with it, including record increases in property tax and rents, and a record number of people experiencing homelessness.

Your government will introduce a rent cap of three per cent to make life more affordable for all New Brunswick renters and update the *Residential Tenancies Act* in this legislative session.

They will overhaul property tax to ensure stability and fairness.

They will work with companies to increase investments in made-in-New Brunswick solutions to housing, such as modular and offsite housing.

They will also work with the federal government to fully rebate the 10 per cent provincial portion of the HST for eligible newly purpose-built rental housing. This is an incentive offered in neighbouring Atlantic provinces and they want to ensure developers aren't overlooking New Brunswick for multi-unit builds.

Your government will model a Community Housing Retention and Expansion Pilot to fund housing in the non-profit and community sectors. This model will support capacity building pre-construction costs and acquisition.

They will invest in the renovation of existing public housing units and the creation of new public housing, and in long-term and sustainable core funding for transition homes and frontline domestic

violence services. As well, they will provide funding for safety and accessibility retrofits for seniors and people with disabilities who wish to stay in their homes.

HOMELESSNESS

Your government will provide wraparound services to those experiencing chronic homelessness. This starts with housing but does not end there. They will also support a community case management approach to address this growing issue.

To do this, they will work directly with municipalities and community groups already grounded in the housing-first approach and support their expansion.

INCOME SUPPORT

Your government will explore a plan for basic income for New Brunswickers living with a disability.

They will increase the capacity of individuals receiving social assistance so they can participate in the workforce without financial penalty or loss of benefits.

As well, they will increase social assistance rates so people are better equipped to deal with the rising cost of food and housing, while ensuring regulations are not penalizing recipients.

Education

STABILIZING CLASSROOMS

Schools are short staffed and overcrowded, causing stress for teachers, staff and students. A better learning environment is needed to ensure New Brunswick students receive the quality education they deserve.

To help alleviate the pressure and create a better learning environment, your government will retain and recruit teachers, support professionals, educational assistants and bus drivers. They are committed to improving working conditions for all education professionals with a focus on improving support and their wellness.

To ensure we keep recruiting new talent to the education system, your government will increase financial support for those entering education professions.

They will work with teachers, other education professionals, experts, and parents to develop a fresh 10-year plan and set a new, collective vision for education.

They will support inclusive education for all students by reviewing class composition and identifying and filling any gaps in staffing, training, and resourcing that have impacted the effective implementation of Policy 322.

To make sure that students' learning needs are being met, your government will ensure schools have adequate staffing, spaces and resources to provide classroom support in literacy, numeracy, and learning behaviours. This will provide students with more small group or one-on-one practice.

They will provide staff and students with the tools needed to create a positive learning environment while properly utilizing personal electronic devices and other technologies.

As well, they will continue Grade 1 early French immersion, while expanding access points for Grade 6 entry into the program.

CHILDCARE

Too many families in New Brunswick are struggling to find affordable childcare. Your government has set a goal of eliminating the waitlist.

To help them achieve this, they will retain early childhood educators by improving working conditions and increasing wages for early childhood educators and increasing financial support for students entering the field.

They will continue to implement \$10-a-day childcare across the province to make it more accessible.

They will also reduce the administrative and regulatory burden on childcare operators, enhancing their ability to provide the best care possible for New Brunswick children.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Many post-secondary students are struggling to find affordable and accessible housing. Your government will work with universities and colleges to develop long-term strategies for student housing.

Economic Development

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

To best serve the people of the province and provide the services they need, the government must be fiscally responsible. That is why your government will deliver a balanced budget every year of its mandate.

ADDRESSING WORKFORCE NEEDS

Workforce shortages must be addressed if we truly want our economy to thrive.

To help do this, your government will provide grants to New Brunswick students who choose to study to work in high priority fields, such as health care, building trades, and education.

They will focus immigration pathways on these high priority fields as well and support newcomers who choose to make New Brunswick their home.

Your government will review and simplify the foreign credential recognition process so that people can get to work faster and easier.

They will phase in pay equity in the private and care sector, using a model that is similar to what is being used in Quebec and Ontario.

They will support unemployed and underemployed residents who want to upskill in the labour force.

LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES

Your government has a goal of leveraging opportunities and strengths by investing in the right sectors at the right time. This includes taking advantage of emerging opportunities in energy, technology, agriculture, and manufacturing.

They will deliver an energy plan that provides affordable, reliable, clean energy for New Brunswickers and businesses. As they continue to move toward a 100 per cent non-emitting grid, they will work with the federal government to ensure that big emitters bear the brunt of the carbon price.

They will close the gaps in cell coverage and high-speed internet across the province so that people can stay connected and have a flexible work environment.

To encourage investments in research, automation, and technology, which in turn will increase productivity, they will review and improve investment tax credits.

They will increase provincial exports by diversifying New Brunswick's international markets and working with our Canadian neighbours to remove trade and credential barriers posing economic roadblocks.

Arts and culture are important economic and social drivers. Recognizing this, your government will better leverage opportunities to invest in New Brunswick artists, cultural and creative industries and institutions. This will create good-paying jobs and a robust creative economy that we can all be proud of.

They will support the transition committee's work on the Status of the Artist.

They will maximize the benefit of infrastructure by leveraging an asset management plan for transportation infrastructure. This will ensure roads and bridges are prioritized for repair or replacement and that contractors are paid on time.

Environment

With the increased frequency of extreme weather events and hotter summers, more needs to be done to protect people and the planet.

Recognizing that every New Brunswicker has the right to clean air and water, your government will update the *Clean Air Act* and *Clean Water Act*.

As part of that, they will require all new schools, hospitals, long-term care homes and other public buildings to have modern air filtration, heating, and cooling systems, following ASHRAE 241. As well, suitable air filtration and cooling units will be added to existing public infrastructure.

To encourage New Brunswickers to spend time outdoors, your government will provide New Brunswickers with 25 per cent off the cost of provincial park passes.

To help build a healthier province, they will work with communities to increase active transportation infrastructure such as walking and cycling trails.

They will increase support for home energy retrofits and the free heat pump program, as well as introduce a provincial program for solar retrofits.

They will ensure that all government buildings are net zero and that the vehicle fleet, including school buses, are all electric by 2035.

Your government will increase conservation lands and waters from 10 per cent to 15 per cent. As well, they will work with communities, First Nations, and experts to develop a plan to reach 30 per cent.

They will review and update the province's emergency preparedness plan so we are better prepared to deal with the increasing number of extreme climate change-related weather events.

They will implement a coastal erosion plan to further protect communities and coastlines.

Your government will investigate alternatives to pesticide and herbicide use and re-evaluate the safety of glyphosate based on new and comprehensive data that is specific to New Brunswick.

They will also implement the recommendations of the legislative assembly's all-party Standing Committee on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship to increase restrictions on pesticide and herbicide use, including examining the banning of aerial spraying.

Trusted Leadership

New Brunswickers look to their government to provide the services they need in a way that is focused, transparent, and collaborative. Your government has made specific commitments intended to build the critical trust that is needed.

They will reform the province's Right to Information legislation to ensure more accessible and less restrictive access to the public and modernize and strengthen the lobbyist registry to enhance transparency and accountability.

Your government will strengthen the *Public Interest Disclosure Act*, also known as the *Whistleblower Act*. Doing so will ensure anonymity and employment protections for whistleblowers, so that no one needs to fear coming forward and doing what is right.

They will operate under an "open by default" principle and improve open data across government.

They will ensure the province's legislative assembly and its practices are modern and fit for the purpose they serve. This will include set calendars, the ability to participate remotely, and modernized committee work.

They will ban out-of-province political donations to increase public trust in all political parties.

They will immediately review and respond to the recommendations of the 2024 reports from the Office of the Child, Youth, and Senior's Advocate. As well, they will make progress on fixing our social policy capacity and making sure that New Brunswick children and seniors are more safe and secure.

Your government will work with municipalities to implement comprehensive and fair fiscal reform.

To ensure unbiased and evidence-based decision making going forward, they will make the province's public health office independent.

They are committed to rebuilding relationships with First Nations based on a nation-to-nation relationship, one that establishes trust and a shared understanding of treaty obligations. As part of this, they will renegotiate tax agreements to ensure all parties receive a fair deal.

Recognizing the importance of both of the province's official languages, they will appoint a deputy minister to lead the Official Languages Secretariat, establish a Standing Committee on Official Languages, and implement the recommendations of the McLaughlin/Flinn report.

As well, your government will immediately review and respond to the Systemic Racism Commissioner's Final Report and will work on a timely plan to implement its recommendations.

These are all important steps toward showing New Brunswickers that your government is listening and wants to work collaboratively. Equally important is that they have already gotten to work on our shared concerns.

Conclusion

New Brunswickers have sent a clear message that they are ready for change. That they are ready for a government that not only listens to them but collaborates with them to find creative solutions to the challenges we face.

Your government does not take the responsibility they have been given lightly.

They are ready to earn the trust of the people they serve, to listen to their ideas, to work with them, and to get to work creating a brighter future for all New Brunswickers.

Thank you.