



# Speech from the Throne

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First Session of the 64<sup>th</sup> General Assembly  
of the Nova Scotia Legislature  
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Lieutenant Governor



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Speech from the Throne

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## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Nova Scotians

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, Nova Scotians. Welcome to the First Session of the 64<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature.

Today, we would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathering in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaw people.

The future of our wonderful province is very bright.

We have our challenges, but I remain incredibly optimistic about our opportunities.

For starters, I am so pleased that today's gathering, for the first time in 19 months, looks normal. Nova Scotians should be proud of what we have accomplished from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I give thanks to Dr. Strang and the entire team at Public Health for their guidance, and also to Premier McNeil and Premier Rankin for having the courage to follow Public Health recommendations with the necessary public policy.

Nova Scotians did their part.

From staying home, respecting Public Health restrictions, missing our families and friends, to doing our parts and getting vaccinated to protect our most vulnerable. Our collective efforts shone a positive light on Nova Scotia.

We have truly been the envy of the world.

And when the world started to take notice of Nova Scotia, they increasingly liked what they saw. The world is learning what we already knew. Our response to the pandemic opened a window through which the world was exposed to our beautiful shores — our beaches, our blueberry fields, our hockey rinks, our golf courses, our hiking trails and, most importantly, they saw our people.

It is our people, both born and raised in Nova Scotia and newcomers choosing to make their home here, that make us one of the most desired places to be. And it is our people who upheld our most enviable attribute of all — our democracy, when they selected each and every member of this Chamber to take their respective seats.

Our system is fair and equitable. It gives a voice to the people, no matter how long you've lived here. No matter who you voted for. No matter the colour of your skin, your gender, who you love, the language you speak, or how you pray — you have a say.

Notre système est juste et équitable. Il donne une voix au peuple, peu importe depuis combien de temps vous êtes ici. Peu importe pour qui vous avez voté. Peu importe la couleur de votre peau, votre genre, qui vous aimez, la langue que vous parlez ou la façon dont vous priez, vous avez une voix.

It was Nova Scotia that led the way in establishing this system.

We led in democracy, we led in the pandemic, and we will continue to lead in so many other areas.

There is so much to be optimistic about for the future of our province. With record high vaccination rates, we are able to open and safely return to normal much sooner than anywhere else.

This means a renewed focus on our economy and population growth.

Nova Scotia is a province where people want to be. Now, it is the job of the government to make it possible for them to be here. We can do that while also ensuring those who are here have every opportunity to succeed.

From providing world class education to cutting red tape and enabling businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive, Nova Scotia can offer the foundation for success, resulting in growth of both our economy and our population.

All of this is possible.

But having the opportunity to succeed also means being healthy.

We have to be honest about the challenges in our health system. When we are honest about where we are today, and if we commit to working together, we can overcome the challenges and ensure that:

- Nova Scotians have access to timely primary care,
- Paramedics are supported and 911 response times are improved,
- Wait times in our emergency departments and operating rooms are improved, and
- Our seniors age with dignity.

Yes, the challenges are significant, but they can be addressed and doing so is the number one goal of our government.

We have to return to the place where every person in this province knows that when they get sick, they will be able to access the care they need.

To that end, we are starting from a great foundation. We have world class healthcare workers who are dedicated to providing the very best in care. Their government is listening to them. Doctors, nurses, paramedics, CCAs, and everyone delivering healthcare has an important voice that is respected and valued. They will help guide us forward.

Nous devons revenir à une situation où chaque personne dans cette province sait qu'elle pourra obtenir les soins nécessaires si elle est malade. Pour ce faire, nous misons sur une excellente fondation. Nous avons des travailleurs de la santé de première classe qui se consacrent à offrir les meilleurs soins possible. Leur gouvernement les écoute. Les médecins, les infirmières, les ambulanciers, les auxiliaires en soins continus et toute autre personne qui offre des soins de santé ont une voix importante qui est respectée et estimée. Ils nous guideront dans nos démarches.

## In Memoriam

A strong future is dependent on remembering our past.

Sadly, COVID continues to take lives. Our hearts break for those families and friends who lost a loved one. It is our hope that everyone who can, does their part to get vaccinated and further protect their fellow Nova Scotians.

This year also saw the loss of a Nova Scotian and Canadian giant of business and philanthropy. Many people will remember Donald Sobey for his business vision and insight, his unwavering community support and love of the arts, but we will remember him for his kindness and his generosity with his time and wisdom.

With all his success, Donald never forgot where he came from and was always proud to call Pictou County home.

Just last week, Nova Scotia lost a son of Cumberland County, former Premier Roger Bacon. Premier Bacon was a tireless and dedicated public servant and a pioneering farmer who helped transform Nova Scotia's blueberry industry.

Our province is better and stronger because of his many contributions.

Earlier this year, we mourned the loss of the Duke of Edinburgh. Prince Phillip served by Queen Elizabeth's side for more than 70 years.

He led a remarkable life, dedicated to public service, working well into his 90s. He will long be remembered for his support of many charities and organizations, including his creation of the Duke of Edinburgh Award program that encourages youth around the world – including thousands of Nova Scotians – to develop themselves through personal discovery and growth, self-reliance, perseverance, and responsibility.

## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Healthcare

Much has been said about the state of our healthcare system in Nova Scotia over the last few years. We have all heard stories from friends and neighbours of the tragedies they have faced. Some of us have our own stories of navigating the system.

Now is the time to focus on this crisis.

We live in the best country in the world. And Nova Scotia can be a leader in this country, from our economy to our education system, but it all begins with providing access to healthcare.

There is no reason we can't offer world class access to healthcare. And we will do it.

It starts with engaging those within the system. No one understands the issues preventing and delaying access than those working on the front lines every day. We have and will continue to listen to them speak up for our health system.

To date, not only have they identified areas of concern and improvement, but they are bringing forward common sense solutions.

Listening to and respecting our healthcare professionals is a first step in establishing more and quicker access to health services.

Our government isn't focused on simply saying what they think people want to hear to improve healthcare. We are actually interested in improving the lives and health of Nova Scotians.

We will continue to do the work and the research, putting forward solutions for Nova Scotians. These solutions will include:

- Incentivizing healthcare professionals to stay and to move here,
- Listening to local communities and allowing them to have a say in recruitment,
- Helping foreign-trained doctors get credentialed,
- Implementing a retirement fund for full-time physicians,
- Providing immediate access to care through telehealth to everyone on the waitlist for a doctor,
- Changing the way we do patient transfers to free up more ambulances for emergencies, and
- Increasing surgical hours to tackle the waitlist.

Solutions to the healthcare crisis are at the forefront of this government's priorities. The newly created Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment has already seen some early successes and promising leads.

Two anesthetists and a psychiatrist have signed job offers to practice in Cape Breton, and two family doctors currently practising in Halifax have worked with the office to address concerns and will now stay in Nova Scotia. Several other physicians are also consulting with the Office to come to, or stay in, the province.

We need to recruit and retain more physicians, nurses, paramedics, continuing care assistants, and others. This new office brings the dedicated focus we need to find simple solutions to address common problems, and we are already making headway.

The new Office is focused on attracting and keeping doctors, nurses, continuing care assistants, paramedics, and other professionals. It will also work to eliminate existing barriers.

Efforts are underway to create a pilot project to make the Continuing Care Assistant profession more attractive by offering on-site child care at a nursing home in Sydney. Continuing care assistants report they have difficulty finding care that matches their shifts.

We will do everything possible to make sure that Nova Scotia is known as a welcoming place for healthcare professionals. This means improving working conditions, removing barriers, and streamlining the system to bring and keep healthcare professionals in Nova Scotia.

More and happier healthcare providers will mean more access to much needed services, which, in turn, will lead to a healthier Nova Scotia.

## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Mental Healthcare

A healthier Nova Scotia means more than access to physical care, it also means access to appropriate, timely mental health services.

Statistics suggest that at least one in five individuals experience issues related to their mental health — but we know that the numbers are climbing.

Thousands of Nova Scotians of all ages and backgrounds struggle with mental health conditions that are likely manageable — if they have access to appropriate support.

Access should not be exclusive to those who are fortunate enough to have insurance coverage or who can afford private care. Access should be truly universal.

The benefits of receiving treatment can be life changing. It can improve lives and it can improve our economy. It could transform our entire health system.

As a province, we must mobilize our collective resources now and remove the barriers of the two-tiered system. We will do whatever we can to end the days of individuals sitting silently in pain and struggling because they can't afford the help.

Les avantages d'un traitement en matière de santé mentale peuvent changer une vie. Un tel traitement peut améliorer notre vie et notre économie. Il pourrait transformer notre système de santé dans son ensemble.



En tant que province, nous devons mobiliser nos ressources collectives dès maintenant et éliminer les obstacles du système à deux paliers. Nous ferons notre possible pour que les gens n'aient plus jamais à lutter silencieusement contre leur douleur parce qu'ils n'ont pas les moyens d'obtenir de l'aide.

Help that would be available if their hand was broken, or their leg needed stitches.

Mental health care IS healthcare – and access to mental health care is a right, not a privilege.

The government has a duty to provide mental health care that must be:

- Free of Stigma,
- Accountable,
- Universally Accessible.

We are committing to build the most progressive mental health support system in Canada. One that embraces people and treats mental ailments with the same urgency as physical ones.

That system starts with a separate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions, making someone accountable. This dedicated minister will be responsible for making sure the system is truly accessible.

To ensure accessibility, our government would be the only one in Canada investing in universal mental health care.

Nova Scotia must lead on this important issue.

If you don't qualify for private mental health coverage, under our plan you will.

We will work to reduce wait times for treatment and give Nova Scotians the care they need for better health outcomes.

We will work to attract new mental health professionals to Nova Scotia.

We will work to remove the stigma associated with mental health concerns and treatment.

Our Nova Scotia will be a leader in mental health care in Canada and the model that every province strives to achieve.

## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Seniors

Too often our seniors feel forgotten. That shouldn't happen. Our seniors have contributed to our province, and to our communities, their whole lives. They've paid their taxes, raised families, looked after their neighbours, and donated and volunteered with charities and local organizations.

They have done this work to leave a positive mark on their community and to set up the next generation for success.

Nova Scotians need to know that their government will make the right decisions to care for our parents and grandparents as they age. This means a significant investment in long-term care that includes:

- Building new, single bed long-term care rooms to begin to meet the demands of those on the waiting list and seniors who will need beds in the future,
- Hiring more long-term care staff to support residents and to support current staff,
- Increasing the minimum standards of care in long-term care properties.

We also know that long-term care homes are not for everyone and that many seniors want to spend as many years as they can in the homes that they bought and built themselves. Unfortunately, as many age and are unable to perform some household tasks, it can become increasingly difficult for them to maintain their homes.

We will provide additional support to help with household services for seniors who live independently and qualify. It's a recognition that sometimes, as we get older, we might need extra support and that not every senior has a neighbour or kids or grandchildren who live close enough to do that.

Not only do we want to support people who are living independently, but we want to ensure that they can continue to do so. Seniors shouldn't feel the need to push their limits.

We will respect our seniors and provide them with dignity and respect as they age. No one should live in fear of what's next.

## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for the Economy

We also have tremendous opportunities.

We have breathtaking scenic landscapes. We have dedicated educators empowering our next generation. We have an abundance of attractions bringing tourists from all over the world. We are becoming a mecca for filming television and movies. We have world class wine and agriculture products.

We have capable and talented people and organizations.

Our government will support them with made-in–Nova Scotia solutions that tell the world Nova Scotia is open for business and has the confidence to invest in its people and its future.

Notre gouvernement les appuiera par des solutions néo-écossaises qui annoncent au monde entier que la Nouvelle-Écosse est prête à faire des affaires et a la confiance nécessaire pour investir dans ses gens et dans son avenir.

Everyone wants higher pay, and every employer would love to pay their team more. Our government will position Nova Scotia to compete with other provinces and countries and invest in ourselves, by putting more money in employees' pockets.

Our government will give employers a choice: leave the money they paid as corporate tax in the hands of the government or ask for it back on the condition that they distribute those same dollars to their team. That's an easy decision, and it will mean more money in the hands of those who earned it: Nova Scotians.

This isn't a plan for the rich, this is a plan for the middle class and those struggling to join it. If you want to stay competitive, you will pay a competitive salary. This means better paying jobs and growing businesses.

To support this growth, we need more trades workers building homes and apartments, roads, and other infrastructure around the province. We know parents don't want to lose their children to Alberta. We want to keep them here and give them every advantage to stay.

Our government will eliminate personal income tax on the first \$50,000 of income for trades workers under the age of 30. Once they're here, they won't want to leave.

We have to train them. That means increasing capacity in our trades education in our high schools, and making students aware, at a younger age, of the possibilities that exist. We will place an increased emphasis on young girls and students with diverse backgrounds, educating them on the opportunities available to them.

There is a housing crisis in Nova Scotia. We have a plan to address this crisis — and attracting and training more trades people is critical to its success.

By focusing on Nova Scotia — our people, our talent, our beauty, and our goods — so much is possible.

This made-in–Nova Scotia approach will grow our province. It will retain our youth and will attract more. This is essential, because in order to make the necessary investments in healthcare, we need a healthy economy.

Healthcare and the economy go hand in hand, and we will work to ensure that as healthcare sees the investment it needs, the economy is receiving equal attention focusing on growth.

## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for the Environment

In 2006, the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act laid the framework for Nova Scotia to make transformative environmental change and position Nova Scotia as an environmental leader.

These 2006 goals forced the Province to take decisive action on the environment which laid the groundwork to position Nova Scotia as a world leader.

In 2021, environmental leadership is a non-negotiable prerequisite for any government.

There is no debate over whether climate change needs to be addressed. The debate is only about how it should be addressed.

Les objectifs de 2006 ont obligé la Province à prendre des mesures décisives en ce qui a trait à l'environnement, ce qui a jeté les bases pour permettre à la Nouvelle-Écosse de devenir un chef de file sur la scène mondiale. En 2021, le leadership environnemental est un prérequis non négociable pour tout gouvernement. Il n'y a aucun débat à avoir : il faut absolument aborder le changement climatique. Le débat doit se concentrer sur la façon dont le problème doit être abordé.

Nova Scotians demand that their government walk the walk on environmental action and re-establish goals in the best interest of future generations. Striving for modern day solutions starts with bold legislation that builds on our history of leadership in adopting green measures and putting forward solutions for climate-friendly, sustainable development.

We will set aggressive targets that 80% of energy will be supplied by renewable energy by 2030.

We are focused on the future and decisions that keep our province, country, and world sustainable for future generations.

We will take the lead from former Prime Minister the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney who said:

"Now is the time to act. Now is not the time to imprison ourselves in ideological arguments. Now is the time to test the outer limits of what we can achieve for future generations."

## A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Accountability

A healthy government is one where Nova Scotians have the information and opportunity to hold their government to account. We welcome this and will provide members of the public and the Members of the Legislative Assembly with the tools to do so.

A government should be willing to defend, in public forums, the decisions it makes. This is a key commitment of our government.

There are only so many mechanisms that the opposition really has to hold the government to account. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is one of them. We will return this committee to its original format and allow departments to be called as witnesses before a committee that meets regularly.

Nova Scotians are also faced with constant uncertainty around the timing of elections because they live in the lone province that does not have fixed election dates.

That practice ends with this government.

Election dates will be set immediately so that every Nova Scotian knows the timeline upon which they will be able to exercise their ultimate right of holding this government and every subsequent government to account.

This session will see the creation of fixed election dates in Nova Scotia.

La date des élections sera établie immédiatement pour que tous les gens de la Nouvelle-Écosse connaissent l'horaire selon lequel ils pourront exercer leur droit absolu de demander des comptes à ce gouvernement et à tout gouvernement subséquent. L'établissement d'une date fixe pour les élections en Nouvelle-Écosse aura lieu au courant de la présente session.

Finally, much has been written about our freedom of information laws and the lack of effectiveness of our current laws. While stronger privacy laws may be uncomfortable for the government, discomfort is warranted if it means holding the government to a higher standard. For us, this means providing those protections to Nova Scotians and walking the walk.

## Closing

It is time for Nova Scotia to move forward with solutions that work for Nova Scotians. It's time to embrace what is possible for healthcare, for our economy, and for our future.

We know Nova Scotians share the hope that we have for our beautiful province and its potential.

Nova Scotians are right to expect that we all live up to the highest standard.

We resolve to give everything we have to make life better for you.

But — if we work together — we can get the job done much quicker.

We can put Nova Scotians on the path to financial sustainability AND fix healthcare.

We can support our traditional industries AND build an environment plan that fights climate change.

We can make our province a magnet for doctors, investors, and tourists alike, and remain proud of our traditions and our heritage.

No matter how long you've lived here. No matter the colour of your skin, your gender, who you love, the language you speak, or how you pray, our government will listen to you, will respect you, and will do everything in our power to make access to healthcare better and your life more affordable.

We have worked so hard. But the work is just getting started. There will be some tough decisions ahead.

But today, we can have optimism. We can have hope. Hope that healthcare will get better. And hope that tomorrow will be better than today.

God Bless Nova Scotia, God Bless Canada, God Save the Queen.

