



BUDGET SPEECH 2008

Securing a Sustainable Future

Delivered by

HONOURABLE THOMAS W. MARSHALL, Q.C.

Minister of Finance and
President of Treasury Board



At The
First Session of The Forty-Sixth General Assembly
of The House of Assembly

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THE ECONOMY	2
Economic Performance 2007	2
2008 Expectations.....	3
FISCAL FRAMEWORK.....	5
Review of 2007-08	5
Forecast for 2008-09.....	8
BUDGET PLAN FOR 2008-09.....	9
Revenue Plan.....	9
Taxation	11
SECURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE	12
Working	12
Learning	16
Innovating.....	19
Improving Infrastructure	20
Growing Industries	22
Strengthening Labrador.....	25
Respecting our Natural and Cultural Heritage.....	27
Partnering with Volunteers	28
Lifting from Poverty	29
Protecting People	31
Improving Health Care	32
CONCLUSION.....	35

INTRODUCTION

Newfoundland and Labrador is not the province it was five years ago. Before our government entered office in 2003, this province was spiraling downward into an abyss, fiscally, economically and socially. Infrastructure was crumbling, social programs were unraveling, raw resources were being shipped away, vast numbers of people were leaving and public indebtedness was increasing. This was not a path that could continue.

We came to office with a new approach. We wrestled down the fiscal dragon by instituting public sector program renewal, performance targets and frank accountability. We ratcheted up growth by developing strategies sector by sector to identify opportunities for capitalizing on our strengths. We adopted some of the most progressive social policies in the country: a student aid program that is one of the best in Canada; and a Poverty Reduction Strategy that national anti-poverty leaders are hailing as the standard by which all others should be measured.

Bold, imaginative thinking has changed the face of Newfoundland and Labrador. Employment has risen to record highs. Economic prospects have never looked brighter. This turn of fortune has not happened by accident. It has happened by design. It is the product of a sound approach, strategic planning, solid leadership and steadfast cooperation with our people and communities, workers and investors, educators and innovators throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

We are stepping up to the plate and making the most of the opportunities before us. We are stepping up our game and intensifying our efforts to translate investment prospects into prosperity. We are stepping up to a new plateau of success and strength by putting the resources and talents of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to work more effectively **to secure a sustainable future** in which our families can prosper and thrive for generations to come. We are standing tall as powerful contributors to the federation – as masters of our own domain, stronger and more secure than we have ever been before. And even though we would rather find a federal government that is ready to work *with* us as partners for growth instead of *against* us as partisan foes, nothing will hold us back from achieving our goals and fulfilling our dreams.

We continue to feel a deep sense of betrayal and frustration over the federal government's refusal to honour their explicit written commitment to remove nonrenewable resource revenues from the calculation of Equalization entitlements. By

keeping their word, they would have advanced our efforts to address our excessive burden of debt and achieve parity in the federation. Nevertheless, their unwillingness to honour their written commitment will do nothing to prevent us from achieving our goals on our own steam.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker, our strong fiscal performance has allowed us to take bold measures to improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by enhancing existing programs and services, offering new programs and services, providing support for the vulnerable, building new infrastructure and rebuilding old, lowering taxes and paying down debt.

Fiscal health and economic strength go hand-in-hand. Economic performance provides a measure of the improvement in the lives of our people.

Economic Performance 2007

Last year, the number of people employed in our province grew. The unemployment rate fell to 13.6 per cent, a reduction of 1.2 percentage points from the previous year. While this unemployment rate is the lowest in 26 years, Mr Speaker, this rate is still unacceptably high, so we will continue to implement policies that see this number decline.

Last year, personal income grew by 4.3 per cent, while the largest personal income tax cut in the province's history put more money back into the hands of taxpayers, boosting personal disposable income growth by five per cent. This growth in disposable income, along with increased consumer confidence, resulted in exceptional growth in retail sales of 9.5 per cent. Residential construction investment increased by an impressive 9.9 per cent with gains in both new and renovation spending, with 2,652 housing starts for the year.

Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 7.9 per cent last year driven largely by exports of oil and minerals followed by the consumer and government sectors.

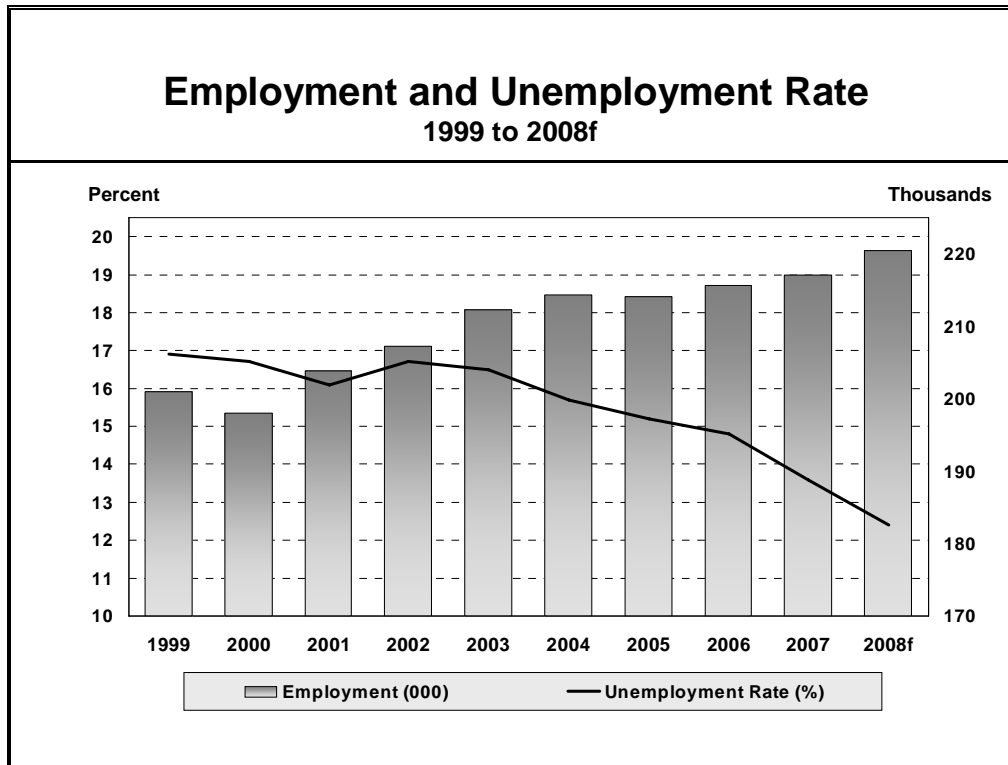
Newfoundland and Labrador				
Main Economic Indicators				
(Percentage Change)				
	<u>2007e</u>	<u>2008f</u>	<u>2009f</u>	<u>2010f</u>
Gross Domestic Product				
Nominal	14.5	3.6	-1.9	-5.0
Real	7.9	-2.0	3.7	-2.8
Personal Income				
Nominal	4.3	4.9	4.8	5.3
Real	2.8	2.8	2.3	2.7
Retail Sales				
Nominal	9.5	6.5	4.5	4.7
Real	8.5	6.2	3.0	3.2
Housing Starts (number)	2,652	2,657	2,552	2,516
Consumer Price Index	1.5	2.0	2.5	2.5
Employment Growth	0.6	1.5	1.1	1.4
Unemployment Rate (percent)	13.6	12.4	11.9	11.3

2008 Expectations

Mr. Speaker, real GDP is forecast to decline by two per cent in 2008, resulting from lower offshore oil production. Nevertheless, capital investment is expected to increase by an extraordinary 15 per cent, largely on the strength of increased oil and gas investment. Combined capital expenditures on Hibernia, Terra Nova and White Rose are expected to be around \$1 billion. This outstanding investment in this province speaks to the continued momentum of our oil and gas industry.

Mr. Speaker, the momentum in residential construction is expected to continue as the number of housing starts this year is expected to be 2,657, a level consistent with last year and an indicator of high consumer confidence.

Last year, the unemployment rate was at a 26 year low. This year, employment is expected to increase by 1.5 per cent, adding another 3,300 jobs, and shaving another 1.2 percentage points off the unemployment rate to 12.4 per cent.



Anyone familiar with the history of Newfoundland and Labrador knows that out-migration has been part of us for a long, long time. All of us have felt the sense of loss as loved ones moved away to find work, often sacrificing a better quality of life in the bargain. We are about to turn a new page in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. Never in the history of the province has there been greater opportunity for young people, especially those with post-secondary education, and, in particular, those with skilled trades.

Mr. Speaker, we have more jobs being created than people entering the work force, and we have many major projects operating or on the horizon including Hibernia, Terra Nova, White Rose, Hebron, Voisey's Bay, a nickel processing facility, expansion at IOCC, the Lower Churchill, a potential new liquefied natural gas transshipment terminal, a potential new refinery and potential for a large shipbuilding contract at Marystown. In order to fill these jobs, we will have to attract people back to the province. It has already begun. For the second half of the 2007 calendar year, there was net in-migration of almost 2,000 people to Newfoundland and Labrador. Most of the people moving to the province came from Alberta and Ontario, and we look forward to welcoming more in the years ahead.

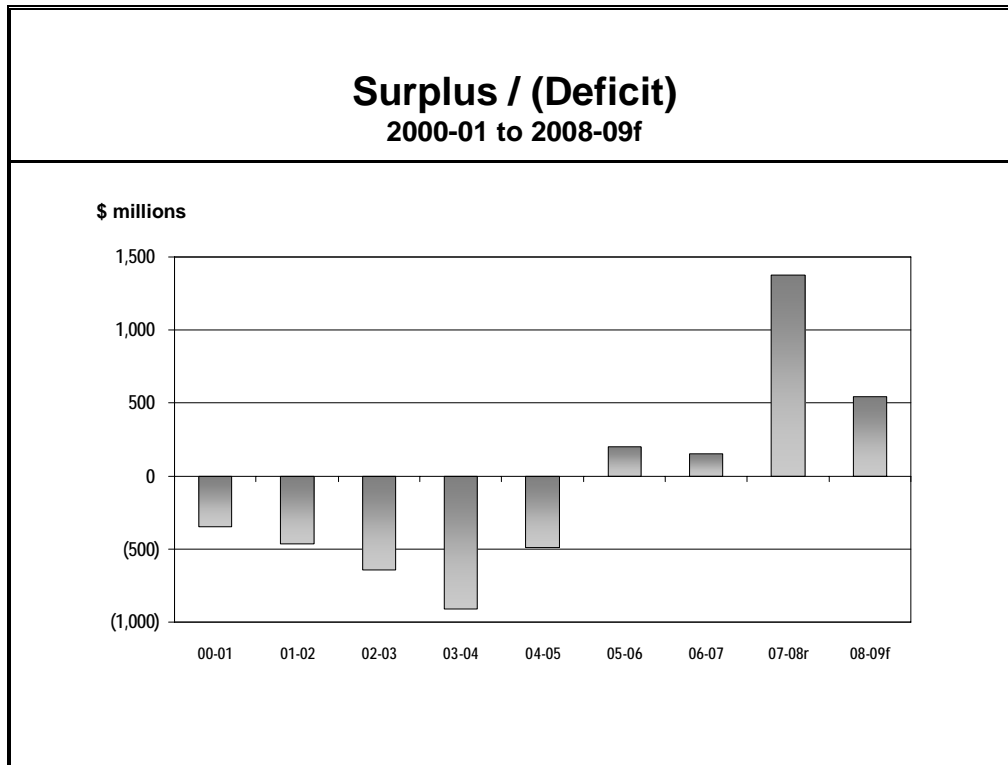
FISCAL FRAMEWORK

Review of 2007-08

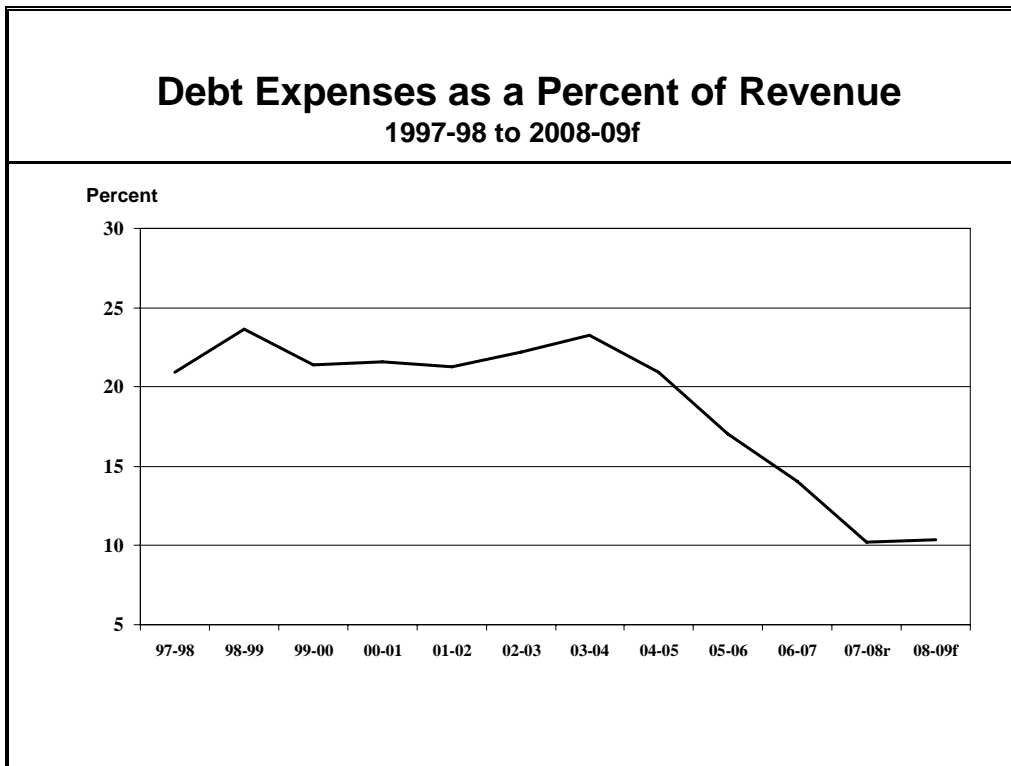
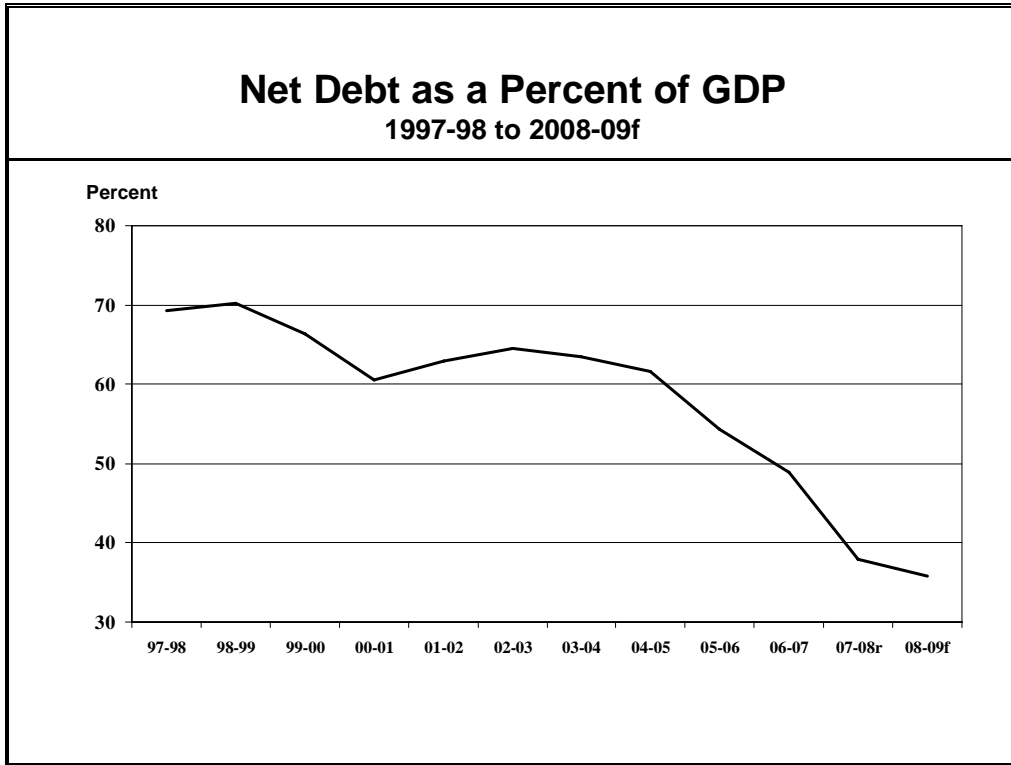
When I delivered my first Budget speech last year, I said: “We must remain cognizant of the fact that our financial position can be influenced significantly by changes in resource prices. Our estimates were determined based upon advice provided by independent authorities, but these estimates could fluctuate significantly.” While these words are somewhat prophetic, there were few forecasters who foresaw such a dramatic climb in oil and mineral prices, or such a weakening of the American dollar. At Budget last year, we had forecast that offshore royalties would be \$1.04 billion. We are now projecting that offshore royalties will be \$1.67 billion, an increase of \$633 million above the original Budget estimate.

Statement of Operations 2007-08			
(\$ millions)			
	Budget	Revised	Variance
Revenue	5,632.1	6,601.0	968.9
Net Expenses:			
Program Expenses	4,839.4	4,694.8	144.6
Debt Servicing Expenses	727.0	729.9	(2.9)
Total Net Expenses	5,566.4	5,424.7	141.7
Net Income of Government Business Enterprises	195.5	200.2	4.7
Surplus	261.2	1,376.5	1,115.3

I am pleased to say that the surplus for the year that just ended, the third consecutive surplus, will be the largest in the history of the province. Mr. Speaker, when the books are closed on the 2007-08 fiscal year, we expect a surplus of almost \$1.4 billion.



I am also pleased to say that our net debt, which was more than double the per capita national average, will be reduced from \$11.6 billion to \$10.3 billion. This shows solid progress in reducing the net debt, but I would be remiss if I did not caution that we must remain vigilant in efforts to continue to reduce net debt to a level that promotes long-term sustainability. Unless we substantially reduce our debt, real and meaningful financial stability will continue to elude us. And without financial stability, we will be incapable of sustaining the social programs and services our people need. We must never lose sight of our long-term sustainability.



Forecast for 2008-09

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure and hope for the future that I am projecting a fourth consecutive surplus in 2008-09. This is something that we would not have dared to dream when we took office in 2003 and were grappling with potential consecutive deficits in excess of \$1 billion. I am pleased to report that I am forecasting a surplus this year of \$544 million.

Statement of Operations 2008-09		
(\$ millions)		
	2007-08	2008-09
	Revised	Estimate
Revenue	6,601.0	6,355.8
Net Expenses:		
Program Expenses	4,694.8	5,299.9
Debt Servicing Expenses	729.9	724.5
Total Net Expenses	5,424.7	6,024.4
Net Income of Government Business Enterprises	200.2	212.5
Surplus	1,376.5	543.9

The surpluses which we will record for 2007-08 and are forecasting for 2008-09 will allow the province to make capital investments of \$483 million. They will allow the province to make investments in resource projects such as Hebron and White Rose as well as in our energy corporation totaling \$329 million. They will allow the province to repay debt in the amount of \$451 million.

Mr. Speaker, the province's **public service employees** work hard in a wide variety of roles to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Early in our first term as we wrestled with the fiscal challenges we inherited, their sacrifices made an important difference. We have made a commitment to them that, as our circumstances improve, they will share in the benefits. Currently, we are working with various bargaining units

at the negotiating table in an effort to reach acceptable agreements. We are prepared to commit approximately \$1.4 billion cumulatively in the next four years to negotiate contract improvements.

Mr. Speaker, these investments in our future will be made without incurring any new borrowings in 2008-09. This is a monumental achievement for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

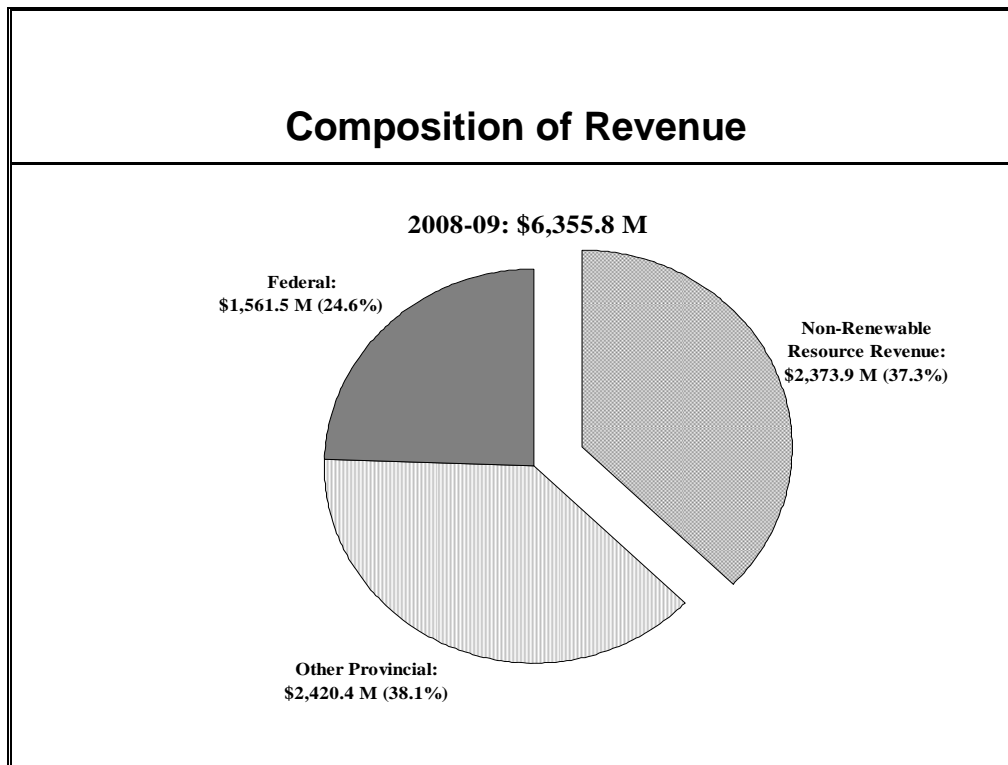
The Budget Outlook (\$ millions)			
	<u>2008-09f</u>	<u>2009-10f</u>	<u>2010-11f</u>
Revenue	6,355.8	6,611.4	6,582.5
Net Expenses:			
Program Expenses	5,299.9	5,738.7	5,883.2
Debt Servicing Expenses	724.5	713.9	704.5
Total Net Expenses	6,024.4	6,452.6	6,587.7
Net Income of Government Business Enterprises	212.5	220.0	240.8
Surplus	543.9	378.8	235.6

BUDGET PLAN FOR 2008-09

Revenue Plan

Mr. Speaker, I am optimistic over the prospects for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. At the same time, the fact that over 37 per cent of our revenues accrue directly from non-renewable resources in an environment of historically high prices gives me cause for concern over the volatility inherent in these revenue sources. Last year, we saw oil prices range from as high as \$104 US to as low as \$67 US. Nickel prices ranged from as high as \$24.50 US to as low as \$11.50 US. The Canadian dollar,

relative to the US dollar, was as high as \$1.10 and as low as \$0.86. Much of the volatility was driven by economic events in the United States, as well as other events around the world. As we entered the current fiscal year, many analysts were saying that the US economy was in, or is headed for, a recession.



We are forecasting oil royalties at \$1.7 billion this year, an increase of \$47 million over last year, based on oil prices averaging approximately \$87 US and an exchange rate of \$0.99. Mr. Speaker, while this forecast appears conservative given today's price, it is prudent to be conservative given the volatility of prices. There is no guarantee that prices will stay at current levels. Five provinces have released oil price forecasts with their recent budgets, and the average is \$83.28 US for West Texas Intermediate (WTI), which on any given day can be \$3.00 to \$8.00 higher than oil from our offshore area. Alberta, the province with the greatest oil and gas resources, has used a WTI price of \$78 US in its recent budget, so we feel our forecast of \$87 US to be very reasonable.

Mineral prices this year are expected to be less than last year. We expect mining royalties to be about \$259 million, a decline of \$53 million reflecting lower nickel prices this year.

Mr. Speaker, we are also on the threshold of another great milestone in the history of this great province. We are forecasting that this year, Equalization entitlements will be a mere \$18 million, and we anticipate we could be off Equalization in the following year. This will mark a significant turning point in the long history of this province. No longer will Newfoundland and Labrador be looked at as the poor cousin of Confederation, but we will begin to take our place as an economic driver of Canada. It will be a day for great celebration.

Taxation

Mr. Speaker, in Budget 2007, I was pleased to announce the largest **Personal Income Tax** cut in the province's history – a reduction that put over \$155 million back into the hands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, setting our personal income tax rates at the lowest levels in Atlantic Canada. Mr. Speaker, we are continuing this momentum. I am pleased to announce that, effective July 1, 2008, the tax rate on each of our three tax brackets will be further reduced by one percentage point. This reduction in our Personal Income Tax rates will continue to move the province to a more competitive tax system that will encourage investment and increased employment in Newfoundland and Labrador. It will put another \$75 million back into the hands of the people of the province and bring the total annualized reduction in the Personal Income Tax burden over the past two budgets to \$230 million.

As the Premier announced on April 22, the province is also eliminating the 15 per cent **Retail Sales Tax on insurance premiums** effective January 1, 2008. This will put \$94 million back into the hands of taxpayers this year, and \$75 million annually thereafter, and will benefit each and every household, corporation, small business, community, municipality and volunteer organization in this province.

Also, effective January 1, 2008, the province will increase the payroll exemption threshold related to the **Payroll Tax** to \$1,000,000. This will take an additional 308 small and medium sized businesses off the tax roll and reduce the tax burden for 578 others. This measure will put \$6.5 million back into the hands of employers, money that can be used to create new jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to announce the fulfillment of a commitment in our 2007 Blueprint to reduce **motor registration fees** for vehicles in the province. Effective May 1, 2008, fees charged to register passenger vehicles, light trucks, vans and light

commercial vehicles in Newfoundland and Labrador will be reduced from \$180 to \$140 per year – a \$10 million annual benefit for the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, a year ago in Budget 2007, we enhanced the **Seniors' Benefit** for married seniors, benefiting 5,900 senior couples. In this Budget, we are enhancing the Seniors' Benefit for single seniors. The change is designed to reflect the fact that the cost of living for a single senior is not substantially different from the cost of living for a married senior couple. Effective for 2008, single seniors will be entitled to the same level of benefit as married seniors. A single senior will receive a maximum benefit of \$776, double the maximum amount available in 2007. The full benefit is available to single seniors with net incomes up to \$25,275 while a single senior with net income between \$25,275 and \$31,930 can receive a partial benefit. A total of 31,500 seniors will benefit from these changes.

The value of the tax and other revenue reductions announced today is \$179 million annually. When combined with the tax measures implemented in 2007, this government has reduced the financial burden on individuals, families and businesses by \$342 million annually. This is a very competitive tax regime that will bolster our efforts to recruit and retain workers and promote net in-migration to Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, through these initiatives, people throughout our province will benefit tangibly from the new prosperity that we are enjoying in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SECURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Working

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to work with the people of this province in taking all the steps required to secure a sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are among the most industrious people in the country. The same enterprising attitude that enabled our own communities to endure for hundreds of years has helped to build economic miracles across Canada in places like Toronto, Cambridge, Fort McMurray and far beyond. Now we need people with that same enterprising attitude to help us build an economic miracle here at home. We are issuing a clarion call to local residents young and old, to our expatriates and to immigrants from far and wide to join with us as we prepare to step up to a new plateau of economic activity.

Already, major successes in our energy sector, our mining sector and many others have helped to usher in a period of inspiring economic growth. But that is only a foretaste of the opportunities awaiting Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government recognized early on that we would need to be prepared to make the most of these magnificent prospects. In addition to commissioning strategic plans in sectors promising growth, we commissioned a **Skills Task Force** to begin the process of ensuring Newfoundland and Labrador would be ready with the skilled people needed to do the work. The Skills Task Force reported last year and we have already moved forward to implement the Action Plan.

This year, we are stepping up our level of preparedness by launching a broad spectrum of initiatives that will be known collectively as **Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador**. With an investment of \$5.3 million, Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador will focus on connecting employers seeking workers with the people they need to get the job done. To explain how it will work, let me describe some of the needs it will address.

- Our students and job seekers need reliable information about the career paths that will enable them to build a secure future in our province.
- Expatriates, immigrants and other prospective job recruits need reliable information about the changing labour market conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador and the many benefits of working and living here.
- Employers need reliable information about the supports available to help them recruit and retain the workers they require.
- The government needs reliable information about the factors that influence the decisions people make on what to study, where to work and where to live so we can adjust our approach to recruitment and retention accordingly.
- People with disabilities and others often marginalized in our society sometimes need special assistance to get into the work force.

Through Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador, we will address all of those needs in ways that will bring the benefits of growth to people and communities throughout our province.

The free flow of reliable information is essential to the success of our approach. Through Opportunities Newfoundland and Labrador, we will inform high school students, post-secondary students, job seekers, marginalized groups and workers both inside and outside our province about existing and emerging employment opportunities, training and career supports, and the many benefits of working in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is critical that we spark the fires of engagement among our province's young people. To that end, we are investing approximately \$1 million to retain expertise to undertake a major project to engage young people in this province in decisions on their future. We will implement a **Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy** to develop and apply innovative approaches to encourage our young people to stay in our province. This government is strengthening the capacity of our communities to forge meaningful solutions that advance the interests of young people. To complement the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy, we are providing a total annual investment of \$2.6 million to the Community Youth Network to support the delivery of vital youth leadership, learning and social development programs in the province.

We will strengthen our capacity to develop and disseminate **labour market information** that stakeholders in the public, private and academic sectors require to better identify and meet their human resources needs. We will enhance our capacity to forecast future labour demands and to monitor graduate outcomes, recruitment and retention challenges, employment activity and worker mobility.

Having seen how other jurisdictions recruit workers here in this province, we are stepping up with recruitment initiatives of our own. We will collaborate with our province's employers in hosting regular **job fairs** throughout our province and beyond.

We will also sponsor recruitment sessions in our **Career / Work Centres** which will enable local employers to share information about opportunities in their businesses, to accept job applications and even to conduct job interviews on the spot. Last year, we invested a million dollars to establish six Career / Work Centres throughout the province. This year, we will more than double that investment to establish six additional centres in new areas.

Information technology gives us powerful new tools to match people seeking work with employers seeking workers. We will proceed to develop an online **International Registry** to help Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, expatriates and others throughout

Canada and the world identify local job opportunities while, at the same time, enabling employers to access the employees they need. People will be able to submit information about their skills, work experience and job preferences to a database that employers will be able to access when they are ready to hire.

There are some in our province who want to work but need help surmounting barriers. Recognizing these challenges, our government is establishing a **Division of Disabilities** to identify initiatives we can take to help people overcome the barriers they face, including barriers to working.

We will promote greater labour market participation for persons with disabilities by enhancing the **Training Service Program** to meet the higher demand for post-secondary education, and provide more job trainers under the **Supported Employment Program**. We will also enhance employment programs by strengthening partnerships with groups that provide services to persons with disabilities as well as to youth and other individuals who often have difficulty making labour force attachments.

We are also increasing our commitment to the **Opening Doors Program** which provides employment opportunities in government departments and agencies to persons with disabilities. Through an additional annual investment of \$340,000, we will provide meaningful employment opportunities for an additional eight individuals.

We will work to attract more immigrants to our province as we continue to implement our **Immigration Strategy**, and we will work to promote a greater appreciation of the many benefits immigration brings to Newfoundland and Labrador by implementing a Multiculturalism Policy to celebrate diversity and promote harmonious relations among all cultures.

We will support the promotion of the French language and Francophone culture in the province, forging ties between Newfoundland and Labrador and Québec, in order to promote the development and vitality of French-speaking communities – **the Francophonie**. The recently-signed agreement with the province of Québec sets the foundation for cooperation and exchange in a variety of sectors: education, culture, youth, French language, economy, communications, health, early childhood, justice, status of women and immigration.

Aboriginal people in Canada have raised their own concerns about labour market participation and unemployment rates that are generally higher within Aboriginal communities than among non-Aboriginal Canadians. In consultation with Aboriginal

people in this province, our government has acknowledged the need to develop culturally-relevant curriculum that will more effectively engage Aboriginal students. This year, we will create a new **Aboriginal Literacy Development Consultant** position dedicated to this task. This consultant will be situated in Labrador and will work closely with members of Aboriginal communities to develop curriculum that reflects Aboriginal cultures and Adult Basic Education programs to better address the literacy challenges in Aboriginal communities.

We want to ensure all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are equipped to seize the opportunities before us. We have an obligation to work together, not only to ensure employers can find the people they need to work, but also to ensure our people can take advantage of opportunities that will improve their own individual circumstances.

Our government has worked strategically to build fiscal strength, improve economic opportunity, promote economic and social inclusion and protect our cultural heritage. A common thread to achieving these goals is reversing the trend of population decline. **Family-focused policies** are an integral element of rebuilding our population. Among the Blueprint commitments to nurture family growth is a plan to provide a payment of \$1,000 for each child born or adopted plus a supplement of \$100 per month in relation to parental support. We have provided \$12.4 million in Budget 2008 to deliver on this commitment.

Learning

Mr. Speaker, the path to opportunity begins in our earliest years. Each child's path is different, but we have a collective obligation to ensure every child is fully supported and prepared to advance along that path.

For many years, parents, educators and administrators in this province have been especially concerned about the approach to educating students with special learning needs. They told us they were overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork associated with the **Individual Support Services Plan (ISSP) and the Pathways model**. We heard their concerns and took action to have the ISSP and Pathways model reviewed. In December, we outlined the actions our government will take in response to the recommendations of an independent report on the system. We have already commenced work on this initiative and this year, with an investment of \$2.4 million, we will implement the action plan we announced in December to address those concerns.

Like the province's teachers, we also had concerns about the **teacher allocation formula**. If we had followed the old formula, there would be 540 fewer teachers in the province in September than there were in 2003. Instead, we listened to parents and educators. We established an independent Teacher Allocation Commission and, in March, we announced the actions we are taking to implement key recommendations of that report. The new model represents a fundamental shift from a numerical formula to a needs-based approach. Allocations will now reflect programming and teaching needs.

We already took action in our first term to cap class sizes in Grades 1 to 3. In keeping with the recommendations of the Teacher Allocation Commission's report, we are expanding the cap on class sizes to include Kindergarten, Grade 4 and Grade 7 in September, and other grades in the following two years. We are allocating \$3.56 million this year to help school districts with their individual planning for school programming and teaching needs, which will include a more generous allocation of specialist teachers, principals and assistant principals as well as the creation of instructional education officers to support student achievement, school leadership and school development. With a total annualized investment of \$32.8 million, we have laid a solid foundation for a new and far more progressive approach to allocating teachers.

To complement these initiatives, we are allocating an additional \$500,000 to school districts for discretionary **substitute teacher leave**. This funding will allow additional days for teacher professional development, family leave and student activities.

We are also allocating additional funding of \$1 million to increase the number of school secretary hours. Additional secretarial staffing hours will provide a greater level of service to students, parents and other stakeholders. Benefits include more manageable workloads for current secretarial staff and more effective use of teacher time.

Advances in technology enable many students in our province to take courses they might not otherwise be able to access. We are delighted that the **Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation** has seen significant growth in take-up of its secondary distance education programming since its inception in 2001. This growth has naturally meant higher costs to hire teaching staff, to resource schools to accommodate distance education students, to provide for optimum Internet connectivity in rural and remote areas, and to provide support enabling school districts to assist with distance education delivery. To accommodate this growth and ensure rural students can continue to access a broad range of courses, we are increasing the centre's program budget this year by \$1.6 million.

Our government is committed to improving **infrastructure** in K-12. Since 2004, we have allocated \$111 million for infrastructure work in the K-12 system. In this fiscal year, we will build on that investment by allocating nearly \$89 million for new school construction, maintenance and repair projects. That is more than triple the amount we allocated just three years ago.

As I mentioned earlier, our government is focused on building a skilled labour market to meet the emerging needs of industry and preparing and influencing our young people to take advantage of emerging career opportunities in our economy. Prior to 2006, Skilled Trades was an area of the high school curriculum that had not been renewed since the eighties. Throughout the past decade, space for these programs has been removed or reduced beyond levels needed to deliver the program effectively. The **Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology** program is recognized by industry, apprenticeship and post-secondary officials as an important means of addressing predicted skilled trades shortages in our province. We are committing \$750,000 this year and a further \$750,000 the following year to move forward with infrastructure changes needed to restore this vital program.

The Skills Task Force identified the importance of supporting **apprenticeship** to ensure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians acquire the qualifications they need for skilled trades. Many students exposed to skilled trades in high school choose to pursue apprenticeships in these rewarding careers upon graduation. We are providing funding this year to continue to support apprentices and their employers, to provide flexibility for education and training, and to enable more people to access apprenticeship programs. We are also expanding the Education Department's Advanced Studies Branch to a fourth centre, Clarenville, where officials will provide field support to apprentices, employers and post-secondary institutions.

College of the North Atlantic's industrial trades shops, some built as early as 1963, require modernization and refurbishment to keep pace with industry standards. Although the equipment in the shops is still useful for instructional purposes, there are significant gaps between current training equipment and modern industrial technology. Shop layout, materials and equipment must be aligned with current industry standards to ensure our graduates are fully prepared for the workplace. We are therefore allocating \$1 million to modernize and refurbish the College's trade shops.

As we prepare for new large-scale provincial development projects through labour market development initiatives, we recognize the central role that **Memorial**

University's Faculty of Business and the Marine Institute will play in preparing our people to take key positions on these projects. This year, we are allocating \$1.11 million to expand several of the professional schools at Memorial including the Faculties of Business and Engineering and the Marine Institute to give more of our young people the opportunity to play important roles in the projects that will shape our future.

As announced in this year's Throne Speech and last year's Budget, we will fulfill our commitment to grant **Sir Wilfred Grenfell College** full university status with a separate executive, senate and budget, while maintaining a common Board of Regents to secure a strong partnership between the Grenfell and St. John's campuses. We are allocating \$500,000 to commence with the implementation requirements and establish a new governance structure within the Memorial University system.

To ensure our students continue to have access to the opportunities a post-secondary education provides, we are following through on our Blueprint commitment to continue the **tuition freeze** at Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic for the next four years by allocating \$5 million this year and some \$56 million over the four-year term to provide this direct benefit to some 25,000 students.

Innovating

Mr. Speaker, in the move towards a robust knowledge-based society, we will invest \$1.5 million to form the **Newfoundland and Labrador Research and Development Council**. The Council, intended as a Crown corporation, is responsible for improving the quantity, quality and breadth of R&D undertaken within the province. This includes the development of a province-wide strategy to articulate its role, and that of related entities, in initiating targeted R&D growth within Newfoundland and Labrador. Formation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Research and Development Council represents a significant milestone for the province that gives us a strong, informed voice and lets us plot a course to sustained prosperity.

Newfoundland and Labrador has already taken the lead in promoting growth of our ocean technology sector, where we are capitalizing on our natural advantages and renowned expertise. This year we are dedicating over \$4 million in support of ocean technology sector development. To drive this development, we will be releasing an **ocean technology sector strategy**, the primary goal of which is to increase the level of profitable private sector activity in ocean technology in Newfoundland and Labrador. The strategy's areas of focus will include technology development, branding, access to international markets, incubation support for start-up firms and the development of

ocean observing systems. Through these initiatives, we are positioning Newfoundland and Labrador as the “NASA of the North”.

One of the brightest beacons in ocean science, Memorial University’s **Ocean Science Centre** – also known as the Marine Lab – conducts world-class research in marine science, trains graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, assists local industry and government agencies with research, and provides public education. We are allocating \$1 million to provide new infrastructure that will provide water from a deeper seawater source.

We have already invested in enhancing the vital fibre optic network that links the island portion of our province across the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the world beyond. In keeping with our Blueprint commitment, we are allocating \$200,000 this year to study issues related to the provision of a **fibre optic link for Labrador**.

Improving Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, investments in our information and communications technology network demonstrate that sound public expenditures can have a profoundly positive effect on the province’s private sector investment climate. This is hardly surprising. We have known for generations that **strategic investments in infrastructure** such as roads, wharves, and water and sewer can open up remote regions for unprecedented growth. Similarly, allowing public infrastructure to deteriorate can stymie investment and lead to decline. A failure to invest in our future betrays a failure to believe in our future, and unfortunately such pessimism can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in 2003 and again in 2007 demonstrated their optimism in our province’s future by electing and re-electing a government that has proven it is prepared to invest in making our future brighter and more secure.

Investments in infrastructure not only improve the climate for investment and improve the quality of life of our citizens, but they also **create jobs**. Our investments in infrastructure this year will create an estimated 6,500 person-years of employment.

We have already announced an investment this year of \$182 million in **road improvements**, the largest such funding in our province’s history. This includes a record \$73 million for the Provincial Roads Improvement Program, an amount 10 per cent higher than last year’s figure, which set a record of its own. Initiatives this year

also include an aggressive upgrading program for the national highway system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Last year, we announced reductions of **provincial ferry rates** for non-commercial travelers to achieve road equivalency. This year, we are proceeding with Phase 2 of this policy by extending the rate reductions to include commercial travelers and freight. Construction of provincial ferries under our vessel replacement program will commence in 2008, and we are also investing to upgrade ferry terminals and wharves to improve the provincial service.

This year, we will develop a **municipal infrastructure investment strategy** that will help sustain our small rural municipalities while providing infrastructure support in our province's growth centres. As we maintain support for basic water and sewer, we will also provide targeted funding for several key initiatives that warrant our attention. This will include \$4 million to begin eliminating untreated sewage outfalls, \$7 million for strategic projects such as the Corner Brook water treatment facility and the Happy Valley-Goose Bay sewage treatment facility, \$5.5 million to proceed with implementation of the provincial solid waste management strategy, and another \$1.7 million for fire fighting equipment. We will also leverage federal funding for municipalities over the next three years – \$19 million under the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund and \$16 million under the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund – and we will administer the \$82.3 million federal gas tax rebate program and the \$7.6 million federal public transit program that together will promote environmental sustainability.

We are proud of the progress we have made in recent years to improve the safety and quality of our public water supplies through the implementation of the **Multi-Barrier Strategic Action Plan for Drinking Water Safety**. A number of small rural communities throughout the province, however, remain under boil water advisories and have other issues with their drinking water supplies. Through our municipal infrastructure investment strategy, we are allocating \$6 million in capital funding to purchase units required for the development of innovative methods of providing potable drinking water, particularly to small rural communities facing special challenges. Through the Action Plan for Drinking Water Safety, we are also allocating about \$1 million this year and in subsequent years for the operation and maintenance of these systems, which will provide many more of our people with access to high quality drinking water.

We have made a commitment to review municipal fiscal policies in consultation with Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. Historically, the province has absorbed about 65 per cent of infrastructure costs, but some municipalities struggling with declining population bases and dwindling tax bases find it difficult to participate in major capital projects or operate costly systems. This year, we are introducing new **cost-sharing ratios** for all municipalities for all types of infrastructure in order to enable more of them to invest in the infrastructure they need to grow.

With an investment of \$1 million, we will help to eliminate certain barriers to merging such as disproportionate debt loads and special costs associated with regionalizing service delivery. We will also finance a five-year pilot project in **regional governance** to test the practicality of delivering municipal services over a broad geographic area.

Growing Industries

Mr. Speaker, investments like these in education, innovation and infrastructure are critical in preparing our people and communities to reap the benefits of this growth, but there is even more we can do to promote the expansion of economic opportunities.

Last year, we released the province's first comprehensive **Energy Plan** to guide the development of an industry that is critical to the long-term prosperity of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are investing \$35 million over three years to put the plan into action.

Under the Energy Plan, we moved forward to reconfigure Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro as a subsidiary of a publicly owned **energy corporation** that will bring maximum opportunities and maximum benefits of energy developments to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If our energy corporation is to function as a major international competitor capable of leading world-class energy developments, it must have a strong financial profile. It is through our energy corporation that we are preparing to reap the benefits of equity stakes in Hebron and White Rose and to lead the development of the Lower Churchill Project. To support these projects, the province will provide a direct investment in the energy corporation of \$215 million this year. The province will also provide a \$100 million equity injection that will improve Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro's financial profile by reducing its level of debt. Our equity injection will also bring the company more in line with similar utilities in Canada in terms of its ratio of debt to equity. These investments are part of a long-term strategy to make our Crown utility less dependent on the provincial treasury for its financial requirements as it works to bring major projects and significant economic benefits to Newfoundland and Labrador.

With major resource projects on the horizon such as Hebron, the Voisey's Bay processing plant, the proposed second refinery, the White Rose expansion and the Lower Churchill Project, we want to take maximum advantage of the tremendous fabrication capacity and expertise that already exists in Newfoundland and Labrador. Amongst our greatest assets is the **Bull Arm site**. In addition to our annual \$1.1 million operating grant for the Bull Arm Site Corporation, we are investing another \$2.75 million to prepare for major resource projects through site maintenance and upgrades and through the establishment of a new management structure. The new staff will include several senior engineering and technical professionals who will define optimal uses for the site and manage the facilities during major project execution.

Consistent with our Energy Plan vision, we are also actively pursuing opportunities to develop innovative energy solutions and reduce our dependence on costly diesel. We will invest \$4.5 million in the **Ramea Wind-Hydrogen Power Generation Demonstration Project** in order to purchase two, or possibly three, wind turbines, each with a capacity of about 130 kilowatts, along with equipment for hydrogen production and storage. Adding hydrogen technology and new wind generation capacity to the existing wind-diesel project will place Ramea at the leading edge of the hydrogen economy and demonstrate rural-based innovation at its finest.

Just as we are becoming more competitive in the energy sector, we will further improve our competitiveness in the mining sector by enhancing the marketability of our mineral resource base and improving service delivery. By investing \$1 million this year and a further \$2 million over the next two years for new **geological mapping**, we will provide mineral exploration companies with better information for making investment decisions and will go a long way in promoting new exploration and development.

We are also investing \$500,000 over the next two years to improve the mineral exploration permitting process by developing an online **Mineral Exploration Approval Management System** that will allow easier information sharing between government departments, staff and exploration companies. This online approval system will complement the online staking system that has already been a great success.

To further promote growth in rural regions in particular, we are providing \$9.6 million inclusive of carryovers under the **Regional Sectoral Diversification Fund** to support a broad range of economic development initiatives and enhancements to existing infrastructure to promote regional sharing, community sustainability and value-added sector diversification.

One of our most important industries, the forestry sector, has been struggling along with others across North America to weather major storms. We remain committed to ensuring this industry continues to provide opportunities and employment for our people. To that end, we are allocating \$10 million in provincial funding to add to the \$4 million in federal funding under the Community Development Trust for **forest industry initiatives** that will provide a foundation of stability and new growth opportunities for affected communities.

Our agrifoods industry is already thriving as we expand our markets and develop strengths in critical niche areas. Consistent with our policy Blueprint, we are establishing a \$10 million **Farm Loan Guarantee Program** to provide farmers with enhanced access to capital so they can develop new farm land, welcome new entrants, develop the perennial crop sectors and remain competitive.

Also in line with our Blueprint, we are allocating \$1 million in new funding for **agricultural research and development** initiatives to promote technological advances in livestock and crop production.

Among our most promising sectors is the **cranberry industry**, which is benefiting from unprecedented demand. To ensure this province capitalizes on its natural strengths in this sector, we are making an investment this year of \$2.95 million.

The province's fur industry also offers great promise, but some producers have been facing unique challenges. We are investing \$5.4 million to establish an **Aleutian Disease Management Program** that will enable mink farmers to replace diseased animals, dispose of carcasses, disinfect facilities and enhance biosecurity measures on farms.

No natural resource sector is more important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians than the fishing industry. It has weathered the worst of storms and rebounded to exceed a billion dollars in production value. We will continue this year with the implementation of the **Fishing Industry Renewal Strategy** with \$5 million in allocations this year, including \$2 million for the Fisheries Technology and New Opportunities Program. This is part of a total allocation of \$15 million to implement the multi-year strategy. The province's total renewal undertaking is valued at an estimated \$140 million. Already, the strategy has been instrumental in addressing the needs of the fishing industry and making it more sustainable for the future.

We are also investing to grow the province's **aquaculture** industry. We will invest a further \$4 million in the Aquaculture Capital Equity Investment Program for a total commitment of \$13.5 million. We are also allocating \$500,000 to develop a strategy to address the infrastructure requirements of this fast-growing sector. To ensure appropriate stewardship of the province's aquaculture industry, we are creating a Division of Aquatic Animal Health within the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. The Division will be run from the new \$4.7 million veterinary diagnostic facility that we began planning in St. Alban's in 2007 and will complete in 2009. Together, our initiatives in the aquaculture sector will ensure we protect the marine environment at home while providing top quality aquaculture products to the world.

This year, we are moving to enhance the delivery of **Crown land services** to the public by investing \$720,000 to add inspection resources that will reduce wait times for inquiries about and acquisitions of Crown land, and also to add surveying resources that will reduce the processing time required for analyzing legal survey documents. In addition, we are providing \$75,000 to commence the development of a comprehensive land use management strategy for the province.

Strengthening Labrador

Mr. Speaker, in Labrador, the opportunities for development are amazing. Last year, we announced the **Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador**, a five-year, \$250 million undertaking to tackle multiple challenges and seize magnificent opportunities to advance economic development and social justice in Labrador. In this second year of the Northern Strategic Plan, as we follow through on a range of multi-year initiatives already announced, we are also allocating an additional \$6.7 million for new initiatives that will continue to meet the needs of Labradorians while enabling people in Labrador to take full advantage of opportunities on the horizon. In addition, the total investment under the five-year plan is now projected to be over \$300 million.

We recognize that Labrador coastal communities rely heavily on **winter trails** as a means of transportation, especially those communities that are not connected by road. Last year, we allocated an additional \$150,000 for the Labrador Grooming Subsidy under the Northern Strategic Plan. This year, we are allocating \$200,000 in coastal Labrador to commence the re-routing of trails away from water crossings and to re-cut overgrown areas on certain sections of the trail system. We are also committing \$275,000 this year to purchase a winter trail groomer for operation from the community of Postville.

We are providing \$2.1 million for a new depot in the Cartwright Junction area. In addition, we have allocated \$17 million for construction of Phase III of the Trans-Labrador Highway and \$45 million in cost-shared funding to widen and hard-surface Phase I of the highway. We are also allocating \$4.5 million under the Provincial Roads Improvement Program for various projects throughout Labrador. This brings the total investment in **road work in Labrador** this year to \$66.5 million.

Transportation challenges also obligate many Labradorians to rely heavily on the **Air-Foodlift Subsidy Program**. In conjunction with the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we are increasing funding for this program from \$400,000 to \$600,000 in order to ensure nutritious, perishable goods are available in coastal Labrador communities at rates more in line with the costs of similar products in other communities throughout our province.

Another initiative builds on the success of the **National Aboriginal Women's Summit**, which was held in this province in July of 2007. We are providing funding to assist a committee composed of provincial senior executive officials and representatives of Aboriginal women as they examine ways to implement the Summit's recommendations. Additional funding will provide analytical support to assist in the analysis and implementation of these recommendations.

We are making strong **capital investments in Labrador** this year, including capital funding in the K-12 system, \$1.6 million toward the new francophone school in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, \$7 million for the new school in L'Anse-au-Loup, \$1 million for the school in Port Hope Simpson, \$750,000 for the College of the North Atlantic campus in Labrador West, our \$5.2 million inclusive of cost-shared funding to complete the Mealy Mountain Auditorium, \$13.4 million for the long-term care home in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, \$3.6 million for Health and Community Services offices in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, \$1.8 million for the Labrador West health centre, \$850,000 for RNC housing in Churchill Falls and \$300,000 for a new correctional facility in Labrador for women and youth.

Other **new initiatives benefiting Labrador** include new geoscience funding, new positions responsible for natural resources and the environment, implementation of an Intangible Cultural Heritage strategy for Aboriginal peoples, an Aboriginal Literacy Development Consultant, improvements to the justice system that I will highlight presently, additional social workers, expansion of the Happy Valley-Goose Bay Government Service Centre to provide full-service motor vehicle registration, assistance

to promote participation in the North American Indigenous Games, and a 20 per cent funding increase for the Combined Councils of Labrador.

Respecting our Natural and Cultural Heritage

Mr. Speaker, protecting our natural environment is a provincial priority. We are dedicating \$850,000 this year to fund several components of our climate change and energy efficiency initiatives.

The first component is a \$620,000 investment for year one of a three-year, \$2 million **Newfoundland and Labrador Green Fund**, which will help support projects and feasibility studies that contribute to energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reductions. Our Green Fund, which is funded fully by the province, will complement the federally-funded, provincially-delivered EcoAction Trust Fund, under which \$8.8 million is allocated this year.

A second component of our \$850,000 investment this year is an update of our **Climate Change Action Plan**, which will give us a better understanding of the challenges we are facing and the actions we will need to take to address them.

A third component is our support of the climate change **outreach efforts** of nongovernmental organizations such as the Climate Change Education Centre and OceanNet.

Mr. Speaker, island caribou populations that peaked in the mid to late nineties have since declined from about 90,000 animals to an estimated 37,000. Under our **Caribou Strategy**, we will finance a five-year, \$15.3 million scientific research and action program that will include \$3.3 million this year to better understand caribou population needs and threats and to identify, test and implement wildlife management practices that can help ensure the long term health of the herds.

Tourism in this province offers incredible opportunities to develop businesses, provide jobs and generate economic activity in all regions. With an additional investment of \$1 million this year in tourism marketing, we have doubled our tourism marketing budget since 2004 from \$6 million to a total of \$12 million. We must keep pace with customer demands, so we are increasing our tourism research budget this year by \$425,000 to ensure we have the latest information on tourism market trends and other factors that influence the industry. Our pilot project to extend the tourism season on the Discovery Trail proved so successful in the last two years that we are providing funding to do it

again this year and also to extend the season on the Viking Trail. We are allocating \$100,000 to maintain the East Coast Trails network, which is among our province's most celebrated tourism products on the east coast.

Among our most distinctive selling points is our culture, which we are promoting by moving forward with the third year of our **Strategic Cultural Plan**. We are also investing \$100,000 for ongoing cultural research into such projects as the Status of the Artist, and archeology, in order to further support our cultural industries and the people who work within them. This year, we will increase our allocation to the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council by an additional \$300,000, meeting our commitment to double the Council's budget over three years.

Several events this year and in the years just ahead will provide wonderful opportunities to showcase our rich **culture and history**. An investment of \$250,000 will help our province host the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention around the Avalon in August and the East Coast Music Awards in Corner Brook next February as well as other events. Also next year, with an additional investment of \$225,000 over two years as we announced just recently, we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the voyage to the North Pole of Captain Bob Bartlett of Brigus.

Through our recreation and sport strategy, *Active, Healthy Newfoundland and Labrador*, our government continues to support and promote active lifestyles and programs which encourage the development of our athletes. In 2009, we will celebrate the 10th **Labrador Winter Games**, which are held every three years in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We will continue to support this event with an allocation of \$500,000, which will benefit more than 500 athletes from 30 communities across Labrador.

Partnering with Volunteers

Mr. Speaker, events like the Labrador Winter Games and many others benefit enormously from the contributions of volunteers. In every community of our province, volunteers also step forward for firefighting duties, charitable causes and other valuable work that vastly enhances the quality of life our people enjoy while also setting a magnificent example for our young people. Currently in Newfoundland and Labrador, there are over 23,000 people employed by volunteer and non-profit organizations. Furthermore, there are approximately 187,000 volunteers, who contribute a total of 35 million hours of valuable unpaid time to their communities and community organizations in a concerted effort to make our province stronger. To draw on the talents, energy and compassion of thousands of volunteers and hundreds of community-based

organizations across our province, the Premier appointed a new Minister Responsible for the **Volunteer and Non-Profit Sector**. We are allocating \$650,000 this year to enable this office to move forward and engage this sector.

Lifting from Poverty

Mr. Speaker, two years ago, we announced a **Poverty Reduction Strategy** that national anti-poverty leaders are hailing as a model for the country. Last year, we built on that foundation, and this year, we are announcing further measures to both prevent people from falling into poverty and lift people from poverty throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. In total this year, we are investing an additional \$12 million, which translates into more than \$17.3 million on an ongoing annual basis. Once fully implemented in 2009-10, these initiatives will bring this government's total ongoing annual investment of new funding for poverty reduction to more than \$100 million.

Sometimes, the most effective strategy for poverty reduction involves prevention and early intervention. We will invest more than \$1.7 million to support youth at risk through several new and innovative measures. We are implementing a **Youth Addiction Prevention and Early Intervention Program**. Additionally, new pilot projects will help young people make the transition from residential care and improve high school graduation rates in areas where they are very low. At the same time, we are continuing to expand and strengthen our very successful Community Youth Networks so young people in more communities will benefit. To date, these networks have provided opportunities for some 14,000 young people ages 12 to 18 in 40 communities in our province to engage successfully in the life of their community.

We are committed to do more to help children at even younger ages by investing \$1 million in a package of initiatives to improve access to **healthy food and community activities**. We are building on the success of our Healthy Baby clubs by addressing wait lists and enhancing the food supplements we provide. We are expanding the Kids Eat Smart initiative to include more schools. We are increasing funding for the Jumpstart program to enable children in low-income families to participate in the recreational activities offered in their communities. We are investing in a new Community Collaboration Facilitator for the west coast of the province to apply valuable lessons learned from the successful Community Centre Alliance on the Avalon. This will strengthen connections between the Dunfield Park Community Centre and other community centres on the west coast, drawing in complementary services to benefit children, youth and their families living in social housing.

To encourage and enable income support clients to have **greater participation in the work force**, we will extend the Make Work Pay Workplace Connections initiative to cover all clients who work. We will also provide additional supports to enable income support clients with disabilities to find and maintain employment. We will expand the Employment Transition Project for single parents which has seen over 80 per cent of participants either become employed or go on to post-secondary training. We will also invest \$470,000 in community-based workplace skills training and a micro-lending program to give budding entrepreneurs an opportunity to do business.

Since we took office in 2003, we have increased the province's **minimum wage** incrementally from \$6.00 an hour to \$8.00 an hour. Our government's Blueprint commits to plan for future increases in the minimum wage in a predictable and incremental manner with a view to achieving a minimum wage of \$10 per hour by 2010. This winter, as part of the review of the minimum wage, we sought and received public and stakeholder input from throughout the province. We are considering this feedback and preparing to move this process forward in the near future.

Adequate, affordable **housing** is essential to self-sufficiency. We are investing \$1.4 million to improve access to housing, particularly for seniors and those working for low wages. We are addressing the wait list for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing's Rent Supplement Program and, building on last year's initiative for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing tenants, we are expanding the changes in the Rent Geared to Income formula to other not-for-profit housing. This will decrease rent for working and senior tenants.

We are increasing our allocation to the province's **women's centres** by five per cent for a total investment of \$840,000. Under our government, annual funding to each of the province's eight women's centres has more than doubled – from \$50,000 in 2003-04 to \$105,000 today. These centres provide invaluable services to women and their families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

We will work this year to explore the links between poverty and violence by establishing, as a pilot project, a **Family Violence Treatment Court**. This project is intended to respond more effectively to the needs of victims of family violence, to hold offenders more accountable for their actions, to reduce rates of recidivism and to deal with the root causes of family violence.

Protecting People

Mr. Speaker, too many people in our society are victimized by violence and crime. We have made great progress in recent years in training and hiring more **police officers** and providing additional resources. This year, we are prepared to do more. We are investing \$1.6 million to strengthen the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and the RCMP in Newfoundland and Labrador, putting more police officers in our communities and on the streets where they are needed. We are providing \$700,000 to create and support seven new Royal Newfoundland Constabulary officers and one civilian position. We are also providing \$100,000 to establish an additional RNC canine unit in St. John's to enhance drug enforcement. These new investments will allow the government to follow through on our Blue Book commitment to enhance the anti-drug campaigns for schools and neighborhoods in consultation with police, schools and parents. Also in keeping with our Blue Book commitments, these investments will see a new police unit dedicated to combating sexual exploitation of children and internet crimes. We are determined to work with police to protect children and others from e-crimes such as cyber-bullying. We are also investing nearly \$800,000 to add several new RCMP positions – six regular member positions in Labrador, one public service employee position in Labrador and one regular member position in Gander.

This year, we are providing Memorial University with \$300,000 to design and implement an **emergency mass communication system** that would be used in the event of a crisis situation at the St. John's or Grenfell campuses similar to those at other universities in Canada and elsewhere.

We are establishing a **Child, Youth and Family Services** project office in the western region to improve the quality and effectiveness of Legal Aid services for children and parents in child protection cases.

In keeping with the recommendations of the Aboriginal Law Project Report and the advice of the **Legal Aid** Commission, we will improve access to justice throughout the province, particularly in Labrador where the need is significant. In addition to a lawyer and one administrative support position in Wabush and a social worker for Happy Valley-Goose Bay, we will hire a lawyer and an intake officer for St. John's while also addressing other operational needs.

To address violence at its source, we are increasing funding by \$410,000 for the provincial **Violence Prevention Initiative**. These additional funds will enable us to

increase awareness of violence and its consequences, to support the work of regional violence prevention coordinating committees and, in particular this year, to develop training in partnership with the Healthy Aging Strategy to draw attention to, prevent and intervene in the abuse and neglect of older adults.

By adjusting priorities for the use of existing resources, we are also moving ahead this year to keep a number of other Blueprint commitments geared towards protecting citizens.

We are increasing funding for **Crime Stoppers**, which offers rewards for information leading to arrests and convictions in cases of unsolved crimes.

We are providing the resources and leadership to enhance and expand the **Safe and Caring Schools Policy** in schools throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and encourage students to cultivate a harmonious code of conduct to govern their behaviour at school.

We are also working with schools and other appropriate stakeholders to develop a **zero-tolerance policy for bullying**. The RNC just recently launched the STRIVE program, where STRIVE stands for “Students Taking Responsibility Initiative in Violence Education”. The program is delivered by schools to address bullying and other forms of violence in cooperation with students.

Improving Health Care

Mr. Speaker, the last issue I will address today is in fact the first on our minds. There is no greater priority than providing reliable health care services to our people, and our government is always concerned if problems occur. We commissioned the Cameron Inquiry to examine the problems that were experienced with **hormone receptor testing** from 1997 to 2005. We are determined to learn from the findings and to act on the recommendations when we receive them. Our government has already announced an investment of \$2.3 million relating to key lessons that have emerged involving problems experienced with hormone receptor testing. This investment allows for an array of measures to strengthen the health care system, including the enhancement of data management.

Our government has made unprecedented investments in health care and, this year, we will build on the many initiatives we have already undertaken to recruit and retain health

care professionals, to enhance health care facilities and to improve health care services.

To increase the supply of **physicians** in this province, our government made a Blueprint commitment to expand the number of spaces for Newfoundland and Labrador medical students at the Memorial University Faculty of Medicine by 10 per cent in the coming year and 30 per cent within the next five years. An initial \$4 million investment this year makes this commitment a reality.

To promote the recruitment and retention of **nurses**, we are allocating about \$2.1 million to finance new incentives. These will include \$2,500 bursaries for third- and fourth-year nursing students who enter into one-year return-in-service agreements, relocation allowances averaging \$5,000 to cover 50 per cent of moving costs to a maximum of \$10,000, signing bonuses of \$3,000 for difficult-to-fill positions, and special assistance to secure clinical placements.

Through a \$1.5 million investment we will expand Memorial University **Schools of Social Work and Nursing**, the **Centre for Nursing Studies and the Western Regional School of Nursing**. We will increase the number of funded seats at our Schools of Nursing by 36 to 291. We will also expand the School of Social Work by increasing the undergraduate class size by 15 students to a total of 60, and increasing the Master of Social Work class size by 15 to a total of 30 which will strengthen the preparation of clinical leaders, supervisors and managers. New faculty will be added, the Bachelor of Social Work degree will be redeveloped as a four-year program and support will be provided to Child, Youth and Family Services through specialized training and consultation. These initiatives will support the development of advanced practice social workers, supervisors and managers to address the increasing complexity of social work case loads.

We are investing \$400,000 to place **nurse practitioners in hospital emergency rooms**. In hospital ERs, nurse practitioners can assist in providing a timely response for non-urgent visits by performing assessments, doing minor suturing and ordering X-rays under the direction of a physician. This investment should help to reduce patient wait times in emergency rooms.

We are investing \$1.1 million this year, and \$2.2 million on an annual basis, for continued implementation of **short-term acute home care and short-term end of life services**. Eighteen new positions, including registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, will be created starting in October to support such home care services as case

management, nursing and personal care, home support and the provision of pharmaceuticals, medical supplies and equipment.

We are also allocating \$6 million to increase the hourly rate for **home support**, the fifth increase in the past three years. With each successive increase, we acknowledge that home support workers provide valuable support to many individuals in our province with disabilities, to seniors and to children, enabling many to remain in their own homes despite the challenges they face.

In addition to investing in health care professionals, we are investing \$79.1 million this year in **capital infrastructure** and we are more than doubling our funding to \$33.5 million to address high priority repairs and renovations in health care facilities, bringing the total investment in such initiatives to \$240 million over five years. We are working hard to fix problems that were left to accumulate under previous governments year after year.

Our investments this year will enable us to move forward on several key health care projects that will benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

- We will move forward with planning and site selection for a new hospital in Corner Brook.
- We will move forward with planning for new long-term care homes in St. John's.
- We will continue planning for the redevelopment of the St. John's hospitals, which serve people throughout our province.
- We will invest \$4 million to improve ambulatory care at the Carbonear General Hospital.
- We will move forward with planning for renovations at the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre in Grand Falls-Windsor.

We are also dedicating \$52 million for the purchase of new technology and equipment to replace aging and outdated **health equipment**. Investments include 12 new digital mammography units in the province, new CT scanners for Clarenville and St. Anthony, a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine for the Central region, a new interventional angiography suite in Corner Brook, and a digital X-ray unit for St.

Anthony. This funding is in addition to the \$14 million investment in health equipment we approved in February and brings our total five-year investment in capital equipment to \$128 million.

As well, planning will commence this year to acquire a **Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scanner** for the province. The acquisition of this equipment will significantly augment existing technologies for cancer care and will involve an investment of up to \$10 million. The PET scanner is designed primarily to assist physicians in planning treatment for those with cancer diagnoses, and its purchase will fulfill another Blueprint commitment.

We are allocating \$5.8 million to the four **Regional Health Authorities** to address unique priorities and invest in initiatives including the expansion of orthopedic services in Corner Brook, the consolidation of clinical and business information systems at Central Health, and the addition of portable oxygen to the benefit list under the Special Assistance program. An additional allocation of \$26.7 million will enable the authorities to offset cost hikes from inflation and increased utilization of current programs including home support and services to children, youth and families.

As our population ages, we are determined to continue meeting the needs of seniors and others who require **long-term care and community support services**. Our strategic vision is to ensure the system addresses the health and social needs of clients, encourages choice, promotes independence and mobility, and delivers quality services. We are dedicating \$15 million this year to initiatives in line with this strategy.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to strengthen our province's health care system is strong and unwavering. In total, we are committing, on an annual basis, an additional \$266 million for health operations this year over and above what we committed last year. We are also allocating an additional \$133.5 million in capital funding this year. Our **total budget for Health and Community Services** this year is an unprecedented \$2.3 billion, and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will notice the difference through improved health care facilities and services this year and in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, we are stepping up our efforts to meet the needs of our people. We are building on proven successes to secure a brighter future. Initiatives of the past four years have given us a sound foundation on which to build a secure, sustainable

economy in which people in communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador can seize opportunities for themselves, pursue their goals and realize their dreams.

Among our greatest dreams as a province is to stand on our own feet in this federation as masters of our own domain. Our concerted efforts since 2003 have at last positioned Newfoundland and Labrador to take an important step upward from 'have-not' status to a higher plateau of sustainability. We are not squandering these opportunities but managing them wisely to ensure we do not slide back into decline but instead leave our children a legacy of sustained growth in opportunity and freedom from debt. We are working tirelessly, we are working strategically and we are working together with people throughout our province to give Newfoundland and Labrador the secure, sustainable future we richly deserve. We are indeed masters of our future, beholden to none who would chart our course for us, but free to choose our own path to promise and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud, we are strong and we are determined to take ownership of the bright future that is in store for Newfoundland and Labrador.