



Newfoundland and Labrador

Speech from the Throne

Delivered at the Opening of
The Second Session of the Fiftieth
General Assembly of the Province of
Newfoundland and Labrador
by Her Honour
The Honourable Judy M. Foote, PC, ONL
Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador

October 5, 2022

Speaker and Honourable Members of the House of Assembly:

As the representative of His Majesty King Charles III, I welcome the members of the House of Assembly for the opening of this, the Second Session of the Fiftieth General Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We open this session at a somber time in the history of the Commonwealth with the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, a steady presence in the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and other Canadians as our head of state for more than 70 years. Her reign was a historic one. Having visited our province three times, Her Late Majesty always displayed great dignity, empathy, and a keen wit. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee this year.

To His Majesty the King, this Legislature affirms its continued loyalty. God Save the King! May His reign be a long one.

In opening this session, we respectfully acknowledge the province of Newfoundland and Labrador as the ancestral homelands of many diverse populations of Indigenous people who have contributed to 9,000 years of history including the Beothuk on the Island of Newfoundland. Today, this province is home to diverse populations of Indigenous and other people. We also acknowledge, with respect, the diverse histories and cultures of the Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit.

As we open the Second Session of the Fiftieth General Assembly, now is a time to reflect, re-evaluate, and assess where Newfoundland and Labrador stands after a very turbulent few years, both here and in many places around the world.

Global economic pressures are hitting the pockets of people all over the world, and impacts are equally being felt here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Across the country and beyond, staffing shortages are placing additional strain on the delivery of healthcare services. And the impacts of climate change have altered the way we interact with our natural environment.

But challenges lead to opportunities. Opportunities to innovate and adapt. To step up and help those in need.

Like so many people in the province who have adapted, innovated, and reached out to help, My Government has led by embracing change. With Newfoundland and Labrador solutions to worldwide problems, My Government is rising to the challenge.

The resiliency of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is renowned and was on full display again recently during the devastating forest fires in the central region and after the tragic impact of Hurricane Fiona.

My Government was there for the residents whose lives were affected by these events and it continues to work with its municipal and federal counterparts to ensure the supports are there for those who need them.

My Government immediately provided initial support of up to \$30 million to assist residents and communities as they recover from the effects of Hurricane Fiona.

My Government has been with the people of the southwest coast since the beginning and will continue to be with them every step of the way as they work to rebuild their lives, their homes, and their communities.

MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE COST OF LIVING

The COVID-19 pandemic, global geopolitical pressures, and supply chain issues have all contributed to an increase in the cost of living across Canada and beyond. Earlier this year, Newfoundland and Labrador introduced a five-point plan as the first set of several meaningful measures. This included:

- Increasing the Income Supplement;
- Increasing the Seniors' Benefit;
- A one-time benefit for those receiving income support;
- Funding for electric vehicles and the infrastructure required for them to operate; and
- Support for transitioning from heating our homes with oil to electricity.

My Government also eliminated the 15 per cent retail sales tax on home insurance for one year, offered a 50 per cent reduction in vehicle registration fees, and lowered provincial gasoline taxes by more than eight cents per litre. The gas tax reduction will be extended until March 31, 2023.

The Home Heating Supplement Program offers residents a reimbursement of up to \$500 towards the purchase of furnace or stove oil to heat their home. Payments are already being disbursed. My Government has also successfully mitigated electricity rates through the \$5.2 billion partnership with the Government of Canada.

Recognizing that affordable child care is crucial to helping people, particularly women, enter or re-enter the workforce, My Government has been a national leader in lowering costs to \$10 a day starting this coming January.

My Government recently announced three increases to the minimum wage, based on the recommendation of the Minimum Wage Review Committee, which will bring Newfoundland and Labrador's minimum wage to \$15 per hour by October 2023. It also expanded the bus pass program to include seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as well as youth-in-care and those receiving youth services programming.

All told, My Government has provided almost a quarter of a billion dollars towards initiatives aimed at easing the financial burden that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are carrying due to no fault of their own. Perhaps the most generous package of initiatives in the country. And My Government is not finished yet.

IMPROVING FISCAL SITUATION

While measures such as these are necessary right now, decisions to help residents are made with the province's fiscal situation in mind – addressing our past, present, and future.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are well aware of the significant public debt that has been accumulated over the past few decades, and the debilitating effect this may have on future generations. This year, My Government will make payments towards that debt, lowering borrowing costs, and addressing consequences of our past.

To address present challenges, My Government will introduce additional measures to address cost of living pressures. On top of the aforementioned programs and expenditures, My Government will provide direct relief to the people of this province as they face rising prices of everyday necessities. As the first order of business in this session of the House of Assembly, tax filers aged 18 and over by December 31, 2022, who have income less than \$100,000 will receive a cheque for \$500, and those with income of \$100,000 to \$125,000 will receive a cheque on a sliding scale with a minimum payment of \$250. This is non-taxable, does not require an application, and flows directly to residents. Because you know how best to spend it, for your family, right now, when you need it.

My Government is also looking ahead to the future. Accordingly, My Government will establish the Newfoundland and Labrador Future Fund that will be used to invest revenue from short-term, one-time, and non-renewable sources for the benefit of our next generations.

My Government looks forward to making the first contribution to the Future Fund this year. This will ensure the benefits of the current fiscal situation will provide solid footing for challenging years to come. Just imagine, had this foresight existed in the past, the saving grace it could have been during tough fiscal times.

My Government remains committed to achieving surplus. It will achieve this with continued strong and responsible financial management. My Government has made legislative changes to strengthen the Office of the Auditor General and its oversight of government entities, and changes to the Financial Administration Act to include a new focus on debt repayment, more effective debt financing, and the future fund. Through prudent fiscal governance it is keeping government's expenditures fair, continuing transformational initiatives, and ensuring maximum of every provincial dollar spent on public services. Through responsible debt management, My Government will continue to lower the cost of debt servicing, and enhance government's treasury management expertise. This approach is working, as evidenced by recent improved outlooks from the major credit reporting agencies.

INCREASING ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE

My Government is taking concrete actions to improve health care services and ensure the appropriate care is available at the appropriate time to those who need it.

While recognizing these challenges are not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador, My Government is committed to implementing a Newfoundland and Labrador solution that meets the needs of residents while considering the work environment and needs of our valued health care professionals. Much work has been done, with much more underway.

Community-based teams are the foundation required to transform primary health care. A collaborative community team features a diverse team of health care professionals that provides a wide range of patient services to meet the needs of individuals and communities.

Teams may include health care professionals such as physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and other allied health professionals such as social workers, pharmacists and dietitians. Several of these teams have now been established across the province, and more initiatives are in various stages of development and implementation. My Government will continue to build off the success of team-based care to address specific needs in communities.

Recognizing the need for people to receive important health services as quickly as possible, My Government created a surgical task force to address the surgical backlog. It also developed an innovative partnership with the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, and launched same-day knee and hip replacement surgery to speed up access.

My Government remains committed to providing primary care and emergency room services to both urban and rural parts of the province where staffing challenges exist, and virtual care is an option to address these challenges. All stakeholders are working together to implement solutions.

The process to procure a new, integrated health information system has commenced, that will allow sharing of critical health care information across the province. This system will engage residents in their health journey by providing digital access to their health care information and enhanced services, such as insights into the referral or test ordering process.

My Government has increased investment and innovation in the delivery of mental health and addictions treatment by establishing mental health teams, expanding mobile crisis

response services, and adding enhanced mental health and addictions crisis support to 811.

The health and safety of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians remains the priority for My Government. An ambulance system that meets the needs and addresses the challenges of our province is paramount, as recommended by Health Accord NL.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Central to all of these initiatives are the hard-working health care professionals that provide quality care to Newfoundland and Labrador. My Government has initiated several concrete measures to increase the number of health care providers in the province.

A Provincial Health Professional Recruitment and Retention Office was established, and launched the Extraordinary Every Day recruitment campaign.

Investment continues in post-secondary programs to increase the number of qualified licensed practical nurses, personal care attendants, registered nurses, and medical graduates, with a focus on rural areas.

In order to attract and retain physicians, My Government has offered numerous incentives, including:

- A Come Home Year incentive to bring health care professionals back to the province offering up to \$100,000 with a three- to five-year return-in-service agreement, and is available to primary and advanced care paramedics, licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians;
- \$150,000 to new family physicians who open or join a practice in exchange for a five-year service agreement;
- Income guarantee initiative launched for new family physicians in exchange for a two-year service agreement;
- Increased compensation rates for physicians covering emergency departments in smaller rural health centres; and
- Eligible Ukrainian physicians can receive up to \$10,000 to offset licensing costs in exchange for a two year service agreement.

My Government has also implemented a one-year pilot program to help entice retired family physicians to come back to the workforce, and an additional five undergraduate seats have been added to Memorial University's Medical School for Newfoundland and Labrador students.

Compensation rates for covering emergency rooms in smaller rural health centres were increased as a temporary measure to help retain existing physicians at these sites, as well as attract other locum physicians during periods of vacancy. As well, in Labrador, Category A rates were increased in the last Memorandum of Agreement.

My Government participated in a Nursing Think Tank held in April with the Registered Nurses Union of Newfoundland and Labrador, and developed financial incentives and initiatives to address immediate nursing challenges. These included retention bonuses, signing bonuses for casual registered nurses to encourage them to accept a full-time or part-time position in an area of need, double rate overtime for vacation period, reimbursement of licensing fees for retired registered nurses, a registered nurse locum premium, 24/7 mental health supports, exploring child care options, and bursaries for third-year nursing students. Requests for Proposals were also issued to help improve the workplace environment, and the recruitment and retention of registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

My Government is working to remove barriers for international students, graduates, and professionals. Legislative amendments will be introduced to simplify the licensure requirements for internationally-trained and qualified doctors and nurses to qualify here in Newfoundland and Labrador. A new Bursary Program will help internationally-educated nurses meet Canadian standards, and five new seats will be added to the Family Medicine Residency Program for International Medical Graduates at Memorial University. Students around the world are excited by these programs, and are already applying.

My Government has introduced financial incentives and more employee supports in paramedicine to help alleviate pressures experienced by emergency services staff. With an investment of \$2 million for another 24/7 ambulance and more than 20 new permanent positions, as well as \$5.4 million for air ambulance services, My Government will increase access and reliability. Medical Transportation Assistance Program enhancements will support fair and equitable access to medical programs.

Ensuring that appropriate infrastructure is in place to meet the health care needs of our people is critical to the success of the health system. Given the changing demography and ever-changing face of health care through technology and innovative solutions, My Government is taking the initiative to reimagine and realign the delivery of acute care services to ensure that it aligns with the province's future health care requirements.

In addition to continuing work on the west coast hospital, My Government is improving and expanding the emergency department at the Health Sciences Centre. The new emergency department will serve patients at the Health Sciences Centre and new adult mental health and addictions hospital, and include a psychiatric assessment unit, high acuity-trauma unit, care initiation area, ambulance parking garage, diagnostic imaging area, administration area, and a new entrance and registration area.

But this is only the beginning. A general lack of inpatient beds and access to surgical capacity is a barrier to care. To address these issues, My Government will be working with the provincial health authority to implement a number of intermediate and long-term solutions to modernize the existing infrastructure, including evaluating potential expansions of operating room and bed capacity in the province's busiest hospitals.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

While dealing with these immediate health care needs, Newfoundland and Labrador is taking the lead in addressing systemic health care issues that are being experienced throughout

Canada and around the world. We are not immune to these challenges, but we are moving with a sense of urgency to reimagine our health care system, including addressing the key social determinants of health, and leading the country in navigating this national crisis.

My Government acknowledges that a person's health is influenced by the conditions in which they are born, live, eat, exercise, learn, work, and play. It is influenced by their feeling respected and safe, and by their being able to age with dignity. To a lesser degree, it is influenced by the health care system and biology.

My Government is working to improve the well-being of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians by making changes in the social, economic, and environmental conditions that affect our health, and by rebalancing our health care system across community, hospitals, and long-term care.

SENIORS

My Government recognizes that the demography is vastly different than decades ago, despite the fact that our systems, including health care, have remained relatively unchanged by comparison. Today, seniors outnumber children considerably and this trend is expected to continue over the coming years.

A number of recommendations arose from the Health Accord, including to develop and implement a formal Provincial Frail Elderly Program; support the further development of age-friendly communities and to end ageism; implement a continuum of care for older

adults; and develop and implement provincial legislation, regulation, and policy to provide care and protection for older people. To take this even further, My Government will establish a Cabinet committee on seniors to be led by the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development. Supported by a cross departmental virtual secretariat, and building off the work of Health Accord NL, this team will revolutionize how we address seniors' issues, from medical issues regarding the frail elderly to wraparound services to help seniors age in place with dignity.

PAY EQUITY

My Government continues to make the advancement of women and gender-diverse people a priority and will introduce legislation on pay equity during this session to complement the many other measures that have been implemented to close the wage gap and advance equity. Enacting pay transparency and equity initiatives demonstrates further concrete action to support women and gender-diverse people who have traditionally faced inequitable employment practices.

RECONCILIATION

With the recent marking of the second annual Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, it was a time for reflection on the province's relationship and history with Indigenous people.

My Government remains committed to consultations with Indigenous groups and weekly meetings with leaders that support open and frank discussions on important issues.

Considerable work is being done through the Provincial Indigenous Women's Gatherings and recommendations provided from the Provincial Indigenous Women's Steering Committee will inform actions that may be taken to address the primary concerns of Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, and communities, including the prevention of systemic violence and discrimination. My Government will continue to work with partners from across the country to advance the National Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

My Government and the Innu Nation have launched the Inquiry into the Treatment, Experiences and Outcomes of Innu in the Child Protection System. The ultimate goal of the Commission will be to make necessary changes that guarantee the protection and safety of all Innu youth in care.

IMMIGRATION

My Government is pleased that the population of Newfoundland and Labrador has grown for five consecutive quarters. This reversing trend leads to a stronger and more diverse province and lends to optimism for the future.

This growth is being fueled by immigration, which has become a resounding success due to programs and policies we have introduced. We are well on our way to welcoming more

than 5,100 newcomers annually; perhaps even earlier than the 2026 target announced last year.

My Government was a national leader in welcoming refugees from Ukraine: first setting up a Ukrainian Family Support Desk here at home and then establishing one on the ground in Poland to assist Ukrainians fleeing war in their homeland. Employees assigned to the Ukrainian Family Support Desk have done an exemplary job since March to promote Newfoundland and Labrador, answer questions, and help potential immigrants navigate the complex regulations and laws that would permit them to come to Canada. My Government also acted quickly to ensure that Ukrainians arriving here had access to the Medical Care Plan and the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program and valid driver's licences.

My Government thanks the many community organizations, businesses and individuals who have assisted, and continue to assist, by providing jobs, offering guidance and donations and opening their homes. Newfoundland and Labrador's legendary hospitality has been on full display once again, and we are proud to share that the third airlift of Ukrainian refugees is expected to arrive in the coming weeks.

Of course, Newfoundland and Labrador has always welcomed immigrants from other parts of the world. Just last month, refugees from Afghanistan arrived to join the growing community that already call Newfoundland and Labrador home.

My Government made recent budget commitments to eliminate fees under the Provincial Nominee Program and for staff with the provincial Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism to provide an array of free services to newcomers and employers. These include assistance with preparing and submitting applications through the Atlantic Immigration Program and the Provincial Nominee Program. Such measures have resulted in our province welcoming a record number of permanent residents to Newfoundland and Labrador.

CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Socially, culturally, and economically, the arts community makes an incredibly important contribution to our communities, and our province.

Newfoundland and Labrador's special story is told through music, writing, dancing, art, craft, film, and television. The creative sector grows jobs and attracts tourists to Newfoundland and Labrador.

My Government sees the exciting potential of the province's expanding film and television sector and the approximately 1,400 people that it employs. Through initiatives such as the Film and Television Equity Investment Program, an all-spend film and video production tax credit, and a new Film and Media Production Centre at College of the North Atlantic in St. John's, it is catalyzing continued growth of this sector.

I would be remiss if I did not use this occasion to acknowledge the life-long effort of Paul Pope who we sadly lost this past spring. He was a dynamic force and his lasting legacy will be felt in the province's burgeoning film and television industry.

CLEAN ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Newfoundland and Labrador's key industries have also been expanding, in sustainable and beneficial ways. My Government will ensure that Newfoundland and Labrador remains a leader in Canada in addressing climate change and supplying clean energy to the world.

My Government recently welcomed the Prime Minister of Canada and the German Chancellor for the signing of a Declaration of Intent to establish a Canada-Germany Hydrogen Alliance, and Newfoundland and Labrador has since signed an agreement with the City of Hamburg. These historic agreements display to the world the significant potential of the province's renewable energy resources, including wind and hydrogen development, and signal My Government's commitment to entering the global marketplace.

Earlier this year My Government lifted the moratorium on commercial and energy wind developments and released guidelines for entities exploring wind energy projects. These guidelines include a two-phased approach with a call for land nominations followed by a call for land bids.

Projects will also go through a thorough and robust environmental assessment process that can be completed in a timely manner so Newfoundland and Labrador can be one of the first out of the gate in this competitive marketplace.

The interest in wind energy is significant with businesses, investors, and industry associations all approaching government with ideas or proposals. The province's location as the gateway to Europe, plentiful wind resources and world-class expertise in resource development will be considerable assets for Newfoundland and Labrador to thrive.

This exciting new industry will complement My Government's support of established natural resource industries. The oil and gas industry remains a major contributor to the economy, and source of well-paying employment for many. New developments including the Bay du Nord project demonstrate how Newfoundland and Labrador can be a global leader in low-carbon oil at this time when the world needs it most.

Industries such as fisheries, mining, forestry, and agriculture will continue to sustain the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador as they continue to grow through investments in technology, skills training, and green initiatives.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Newfoundland and Labrador has seen considerable infrastructure improvements in recent years to better serve residents. These include new long term care facilities in Corner Brook, Gander, and Grand-Falls Windsor, and St. John's and mental health infrastructure in

Labrador. Considerable work continues on the new hospital for the west coast region, and a new mental health and addictions facility, and expansions at the Health Sciences Centre.

These investments in infrastructure produce massive returns by creating well-paying jobs and improving programs and services.

My Government recognizes that for the first time in decades, school enrolment is increasing and will ensure there are proper facilities in place for new and existing students through new school construction and the redevelopment of existing facilities.

Work is underway on a new provincial correctional facility to replace the penitentiary in St. John's, as well as a new public building and courthouse for the Bay St. George region.

Just this summer, the paving of the Trans-Labrador Highway was completed, marking a significant accomplishment in transportation infrastructure. The completion allows residents, tourists, and commercial traffic to travel on more than 1,100 kilometres of paved highway between the Labrador Straits and Labrador West. In addition, work is continuing towards the feasibility of completing a road to the North.

My Government acknowledges that climate change is impacting the capacity of transportation infrastructure to handle severe weather events. It will continue to improve the road network throughout the province by resurfacing highways and replacing bridges and culverts. It will continue to support municipalities so they can also make improvements within their boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Newfoundland and Labrador just experienced a fantastic summer and encouraged people from around the world to Come Home. As is our way, we warmly welcomed thousands to every nook and cranny across this great province. The hospitality industry persevered through the challenges of the pandemic and rose to the occasion this year, ensuring a banner year for travel and tourism.

We put our best foot forward to remind those Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who now live away, why they remain attached to their home province. We also showed those who aren't from here, just what makes this place so special and unique. We are sure to see many of them again.

Come Home 2022 proved there is hope. It showed that despite any challenges, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians remain resilient and optimistic.

My Government will continue to fuel that hope and optimism by working to ensure this glorious piece of the world remains a place that we are proud to call home.

Speaker and Honourable Members of the House of Assembly:

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence the work of the Second Session of the Fiftieth General Assembly.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberation.

