



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Opening of the
Fourth Session
of the Forty-Seventh
General Assembly
of the Province of
Newfoundland and Labrador

APRIL 21, 2015



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**Delivered at the Opening of
the Fourth Session of the Forty-Seventh
General Assembly of the Province
of Newfoundland and Labrador**

**by His Honour
The Honourable Frank F. Fagan, CM, ONL, MBA
Lieutenant Governor**

APRIL 21, 2015

Newfoundland and Labrador, Proud and Strong

- Honour 100, Our History and Our Culture
- Innovation, Education and Economic Growth
- Health and Safety
- Responsible and Responsive Governance

Honour 100, Our History and Our Culture

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

One hundred years ago, marching proudly in their blue puttees toward ships that would ferry them to war-torn Europe, young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians could not imagine what awaited them or what would be asked of them. A century later, we honour the far too many whose young lives were cut brutally short and the many more whose bodies and memories were scarred by what they endured. Through the “**Honour 100 - First World War Commemorations**”, we are telling the story of our men and women who served in the Royal Naval Reserve, Newfoundland Regiment, Newfoundland Forestry Corps and Volunteer Aid Detachment as well as those who supported the war effort at home. We will soon mark the centennial of the Regiment’s landing at Gallipoli, Turkey on September 19. The Honour 100 initiative will include opportunities for our students and veterans to participate in the annual Trail of the Caribou pilgrimage with the Royal

Canadian Legion. This year, a new Ambassador Program will provide opportunities for more youth to commemorate Newfoundland and Labrador's role in the First World War by visiting the memorials at Beaumont-Hamel and other solemn sites where the remains of our loved ones rest. Like others before them, they will return with fresh perspectives and stories that all of us need to hear – stories to remind us of the unbearable sadness of war and the debt we owe to those who served. As students throughout our province hear those stories, they will also benefit from curriculum enhancements that tell about the people whose sacrifices we honour.

Our government has also celebrated the contributions of the women and men who served in this war and other conflicts by naming the two new provincial ferries that will service Bell Island, Fogo Island and Change Islands **the *MV Legionnaire* and the *MV Veteran***.

In recent decades, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have served on battlegrounds from Sarajevo to Kandahar. Although those devastated frontiers were far removed from the shores of Green Bay, it was there in her quiet Springdale home that Gladys Osmond started handwriting letters to the troops, one by one. She organized a Granny Brigade of like-minded seniors, eager to spread some downhome cheer, well-wishes and prayers with soldiers who were serving in harm's way. Time and again, the soldiers wrote back to say how touched they were that she would reach out to lift their spirits. Gladys passed away in January at the age of 91; but before passing away, she was presented with the Canadian Forces Medallion for Distinguished Service, granted an honorary Doctorate of Laws by Memorial University and inducted into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador. Today, we honour **Gladys Osmond and the Granny Brigade** for exemplifying the very best qualities of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and for reminding us to keep in our hearts the women and men who serve to protect us at home and abroad.

Despite the distances and differences that separate us, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians stand by one another in hard times and good times alike. In the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, there are thousands of people like Gladys whose stories need to be shared. Whether in "Them Days" magazine or on CBC's "Land & Sea", in novels or history books, in folklore research or songs or films, these stories must be gathered and disseminated among our young people to show them who they are and whence they've come. In towns from Glenwood to Nain, from Natuashish to Port au Port, from Conne River to Northwest River, we encourage people to capture and chronicle the tales of folk heroes that more of us ought to know. To showcase the richness of our diverse **Inuit, Innu and Mi'kmaq heritage**, our government is now preparing the terms of reference for an Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee to enhance school curriculum so it will continue to reflect this heritage to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Our government will also **continue to consult with Aboriginal organizations**, including when development decisions have the potential to impact asserted rights. We will continue to implement the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, continue to negotiate the Innu Nation's final land claims and self-government agreement and the Miawpukek First Nation final self-government agreement, continue to participate in the Innu Roundtable, continue to develop a land claims and self-government agreement Implementation Policy, and continue to ensure that Aboriginal people benefit fully and fairly from major developments like the Muskrat Falls Project.

Across the vast stretches of the Big Land, the camaraderie that unites people of diverse communities is an inspiration for all of us. Guided by the Northern Strategic Plan and other investments targeting **Labrador**, by the end of the 2014-15 fiscal year our government allocated a total of \$4.9 billion in Labrador since 2004, and opened up the region as never before with the Trans-Labrador Highway. We will consult with northern stakeholders to develop a new Northern Strategic Plan to raise new opportunities on the foundation we have already built. In 2016, we will once again support Labradorians who gather for the Labrador Winter Games, a triennial celebration of sports as diverse as the Snowshoe Race, the Snowmobile Race, the Dog Team Race, the Labrathon, the One Foot High Kick and Over the Rope. In recognition of the uniqueness of Labrador and the love Labradorians share for their flag, our government will proudly fly the Labrador Flag at our Labrador-Quebec border crossings.

Our multifaceted heritage not only enriches us as a people, but it also forms the backbone of our billion-dollar **tourism industry** in which thousands of people are finding employment and opportunity in more than 2,500 enterprises, 83 per cent of which are small businesses. Our government has invested directly in businesses and infrastructure to help strengthen our tourism industry. It has invested in marina developments, boardwalks, trail ways, airport improvements, the St. John's Convention Centre and various enterprises, all with the goal of strengthening Newfoundland and Labrador's image as a destination for leisure and business travelers. By continuing to invest in our award-winning, trendsetting marketing campaign, we will showcase Newfoundland and Labrador to the rest of the world with a goal of further developing this essential industry. Our government will continue to support growth through our Cultural Economic Development Program, the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, our community museums, heritage organizations, archives and Provincial Historic Sites. The just-concluded Republic of Doyle series complemented our marketing ads by showcasing our uniqueness around the world. In this year's budget, our government will announce initiatives to build on that success.

Innovation, Education and Economic Growth

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

For a decade, our government has been fostering innovation and diversifying the provincial economy, supporting start-up businesses, emerging growth sectors and regional development activities. We are committed to making local companies globally competitive, strengthening employment opportunities and driving economic diversification in Newfoundland and Labrador. Through our Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, we are enabling more than 50 companies to increase their competitiveness through the implementation of industry-leading **“lean manufacturing” practices**. For some firms, the shift has been transformational. One central Newfoundland small business has more than doubled production. Others have seen delivery times cut in half, significant reductions in defects, and improved safety and morale. Our government will drive the use of lean manufacturing techniques by more enterprises while helping them collaborate and learn from one another through our support of business networks.

Newfoundland and Labrador’s major industrial projects have fueled the **growth of a supply community** that is more than 600 strong. These enterprises, in turn, represent the development of an extensive knowledge base and skills inventory that can be marketed beyond our provincial boundaries. The expertise we draw here for these industrial projects will remain and fuel growth long after the projects have been completed.

International business growth opportunities for local enterprises are off the charts because of free trade, international partnerships, supply chain networks and other fundamental shifts in the global marketplace. But the global marketplace is complex and competitive. To help enterprises meet the increasingly rigorous demands and secure their niche, our government will provide targeted **trade-focused assistance for small and medium sized enterprises** pursuing international business opportunities.

We also recognize that building a strong diversified economy is based upon a strong private sector comprising a mix of smaller, nimble firms working alongside larger multi-national companies that are entrenched in global markets. That is why **attracting foreign direct investment and attracting companies with international reach** to the province continues to be one of our trade and investment priorities.

Prospects for growth in the knowledge-based economy, in particular, are incredible. By providing support for **business incubation and acceleration**, we are helping advanced-technology firms with high growth potential to tap into new markets and connect with venture capital opportunities that will propel them to global success.

In no area of technology are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians better positioned to lead than in **ocean technology**. Here on the North Atlantic, we have nurtured a culture of innovation that has enabled us to make breathtaking advances in the oil and gas sector, fisheries and aquaculture, transportation, environment, marine recreation, tourism, security and defence industries. We have built infrastructure and expertise second to none, and are now partnering with other businesses in the largest ocean technology markets in the world. Our government will be even more aggressive in driving ocean technology growth to meet demand abroad and draw opportunities and profits home.

With unsurpassed expertise in taming the harsh ocean environment, Newfoundland and Labrador is well-positioned to take a lead role in developing technology to provide solutions to operational challenges in the Arctic. Our government is focusing on three strategic directions under the **Arctic Opportunities Initiative**: first, positioning the province as the Path to the Arctic; second, building capacity; and third, fostering economic development and business opportunities for local players. Newfoundland and Labrador is strategically located on international and northern sea shipping routes, with world-renowned industrial infrastructure plus centres of excellence in safe and sustainable resource development already in place. That makes us uniquely positioned for leadership in Arctic-related activities. Our government will continue to strengthen relationships among stakeholders, promote partnerships involving local and Aboriginal players, and forge strategic alliances with other northern jurisdictions with which Newfoundland and Labrador can partner for success on this emerging frontier.

We have strengthened our position for leadership in R&D. Through our province's **Research & Development Corporation**, we will continue to invest in R&D projects that maximize the impact on our economy and attract leveraged investments from collaborative partners, particularly our innovative business community.

As Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic engage in world-class research activities, **researchers** from at home and abroad are focusing their R&D activities on local

industries and putting them into practice both here and around the globe. As an example, with the government's support, Memorial University's Holyrood Marine Base is now giving students hands-on experience in marine environmental studies, marine biology, marine ecotourism, diving and oil spill response.

To ensure Memorial University has space to grow, our government has approved the construction of a new **Core Science Facility** to replace aging infrastructure. This facility will house state-of-the-art teaching and research laboratories to support MUN's faculties of Science and Engineering and Applied Science. It will also contain space for R&D collaboration with industry to help them compete, grow and diversify our economy. The province's \$125 million contribution will come from the settlement for Hebron fabrication work.

Tomorrow's leaders are today's youth! To position Newfoundland and Labrador's young people to be the leaders of the pack, we will **support innovative projects that engage youth** in meaningful, experiential learning opportunities focused on the fields of science, technology, engineering and math, but also in the creative world of the arts. Such support and mentorship will open doors for local youth while ensuring that Newfoundland and Labrador secures a sustainable, dynamic and diversified economy for generations to come.

Our government is preparing for the release of its **Population Growth Strategy**, which will support residents to attach to the labour market and align the workforce with local job opportunities; enhance supports for families of all sizes and ages; support community well-being and economic development; and increase the attraction and retention of immigrants to the province. To support the strategy, the government will be launching a series of new labour market information tools to better inform Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and those interested in moving to our province, about where job opportunities exist in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Increasing the availability of skilled trade workers has been a top priority for our government since the release of the Skills Task Force report in May 2007. Through a series of **apprenticeship** forums, the government has engaged employers, educators, students and graduates to chart the way forward. The results have been phenomenal: an investment of more than \$100 million in apprenticeship support, a 94 per cent increase in the number of registered apprentices, and a 122 per cent increase in the number of journey person certificates issued. In 2014, Atlantic Premiers signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Atlantic Apprenticeship Harmonization to enhance consistency. Together, over the next four years, we are working to harmonize ten Red Seal

trades, representing over 60 per cent of apprentices in the Atlantic region. The government is also engaged in developing an Atlantic Apprenticeship Mobility initiative and a Pan-Canadian Mobility Apprenticeship Protocol to make it easier for apprentices to move between provinces and territories while they complete their certification. This will enable local industries to meet their labour demands while greatly expanding the region in which local apprentices can work. Our government has repeatedly consulted with stakeholders to ensure our apprenticeship system continues to respond to industry needs. We will build on this approach through additional stakeholder engagement sessions organized in consultation with the Provincial Trade Advisory Committees. The apprenticeship renewal initiatives under discussion will include implementation of an online application and registration process, alternate approaches to apprenticeship training and exam accommodations, youth apprenticeship programming, enhanced apprenticeship supports, enhanced processes for updating files and an enhanced pre-apprentice tracking system. We will ensure our approaches are relevant and responsive to each specific trade in Newfoundland and Labrador.

To better prepare our young people for post-secondary education and employment, we will proceed with **K-12** curriculum renewal in many areas, including English Language Arts, Science, Health, Social Studies and French programs. We will develop a 21st-century curriculum, employing methods that integrate innovative and research-driven teaching strategies, modern learning technologies, and relevant resources and contexts, and focusing on learning skills that address the needs of a new generation of students. We will also convene a group of educational leaders to review Math performance. To support teaching with the requisite infrastructure, our government will unveil a multiyear K-12 infrastructure development plan to prepare in a proactive way for projected growth.

These efforts in K-12 will be complemented by the initiatives we are taking to follow through in the area of early childhood development. The **Early Childhood Learning Framework**, entitled “Navigating the Early Years”, will be released in the year ahead. The Framework outlines a pedagogical approach to holistic early childhood learning and development, with specific emphasis on play-based learning, the important role of adults in supporting children’s early learning and development, and the inclusion of children with exceptionalities across a variety of environments, which include home, child care settings, the community and school.

When today’s children grow up, they will find a province very different from the one we live in today, and a large part of the reason for that difference will be the transformation we experience

as we bring Lower Churchill power on stream and complete the transition to a **renewable energy economy**. That transition has been made possible because of our government's commitment to embrace the opportunities created by offshore oil, and channel the returns into renewable energy development. Muskrat Falls is a source of power that will flow in perpetuity, long after the last of the oil and the gas have been drawn from beneath the ocean floor.

But the days of **oil** are not ending anytime soon. The 2013 Bay du Nord discovery was the largest conventional oil discovery that year in the entire world. Our government is working with Statoil and Husky to negotiate an agreement to bring this project to development. Our government is also working to conclude a new generic royalty regime to maximize revenues from offshore oil development. Our government's optimism is also buoyed by the successful Call for Bids in the Flemish Pass Basin, the significant growth of reserve estimates for the Hibernia field, and the opportunities created by the new scheduled land tenure system.

In March, the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board issued the very first Call for Bids under the **scheduled land tenure regime in our offshore area**. It consists of eleven parcels totaling 2.5 million hectares in the Eastern Newfoundland Region, and the minimum bid for each parcel is \$10 million in work commitments. The new land tenure regime means transparency and predictability for companies interested in doing business in our offshore industry. It was developed through consultation with industry leaders and is based on the best practices of leading exploration jurisdictions around the world. The new regime is a huge step forward in the province's offshore industry.

In every region, we take steps to ensure our environment is protected. This year, we will receive the report of the expert panel reviewing the **environmental and socio-economic implications** of hydraulic fracturing in western Newfoundland. We will also enact legislation this year to strengthen the province's oil spill liability regime to ensure even greater diligence to prevent spills and their consequences.

Since 2012, our government has been working with other provinces and territories to develop a **pan-Canadian Energy Strategy**. Our government's primary focus has been to achieve open-access, non-discriminatory electricity transmission. To that end, we will continue to press for the establishment of east-west energy corridors so that all provinces and territories have the unfettered ability to transmit electricity within Canada. Our Premier has met with government and industry leaders both nationally and in the United States, where interest in new clean-energy sources is strong.

We remain on track to produce first power at **Muskrat Falls** in late 2017 with full power in 2018. Through the new oversight processes implemented last year, the government is taking a hands-on approach to ensure the project remains on course. Construction of the Maritime Link Project to bring our surplus power to market has commenced, and industrial and employment benefits agreements have been signed. In advance of first power two years from now in late 2017, our government has taken steps to ensure the existing infrastructure is adequate to meet domestic needs. The government will soon complete its electricity review of all aspects of our province's current system, including governance and regulation, generation, transmission and distribution. As Muskrat Falls comes on stream, our government will continue to look farther ahead to opportunities to add Gull Island power, Upper Churchill power, wind power and other power sources to the mix and maximize the potential of our vast energy warehouse. To complement this green energy initiative, our government will also bring forward other measures to promote greenhouse gas reduction.

Let no one minimize the **economic impact the Muskrat Falls Project is having on** Newfoundland and Labrador, even before power flows. The project is expected to generate value and cash flows in excess of \$30 billion. The number of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians employed on the project rose in 2014 to 3,274, representing 81 per cent of the project's workforce. In 2014 alone, the project brought investments of \$394 million to 500 Newfoundland and Labrador businesses. That was just the beginning.

We are developing clean energy, not primarily to export, but to give Newfoundlanders and Labradorians access to a sufficient supply of clean power at costs that are both low and stable, and also to use that new power to grow and diversify the economies of our regions with new and expanding industries. One of those industries, the **mining sector**, is currently experiencing the impacts of the downside of cycling commodity prices. This is difficult news for impacted workers, their families and local businesses. Through the strong relationships we have built with industry and municipalities, supported by our participation in the Labrador West Regional Task Force, we are standing by and working with affected communities and families during this critical period. Programs and services are already in place, along with assistance to support new business opportunities. But as in the past, commodity prices will rebound and growth in our mining sector will resume its upward trajectory. Our government is developing a Minerals Strategy to maximize the value of resource development in the province. We will continue to support the mineral industry through the mineral incentive program, public geoscience and promotions. We have taken advantage of opportunities to enhance the benefits of one of the largest mining and processing operations in the province at Voisey's Bay and Long Harbour. Thanks to that work, Newfoundland and Labrador will benefit from an estimated additional \$200 million in

compensation and a \$30 million commitment for community initiatives in the province. The Long Harbour nickel processing plant is now producing, and Vale has committed to proceed with underground mining after its surface operation advances at Voisey's Bay.

Mining has been sustaining local communities for generations, but no industry has sustained us longer than the **fisheries**. Today, the entire Newfoundland and Labrador seafood industry is valued at approximately \$1 billion and employs approximately 18,000 people in harvesting, processing and aquaculture, while generating indirect benefits for many more individuals and enterprises.

In 2014, our government took unprecedented steps to improve **markets for cod** harvested from the St. Pierre Bank area. They included temporarily relaxing minimum processing requirements to test fresh markets in the United States and authorizing outside buyers. These measures complemented efforts by the harvesting and processing sector to establish quality grading for cod, resulting in significantly improved prices. Cod landings increased, and the overall landed value increased. Our government will continue these efforts to prepare for the shift from shellfish to groundfish over the coming years.

The shellfish sector is in jeopardy because of a troubling Government of Canada policy on shrimp allocations. Last year, we sent an **All-Party Committee on Northern Shrimp Allocations** to Ottawa to deliver the message that the province will not stand by and watch the devastation of the inshore shrimp fleet, onshore shrimp processing plants, and the hundreds of communities that depend on the northern shrimp resource. Recent analysis has confirmed that the federal government's "Last In First Out" allocation policy has had a disproportionate detrimental impact on this province's inshore fleet and onshore processing. The Committee will continue to press the federal government to abolish the inequitable LIFO policy being used for the northern shrimp fishery.

Our government also continues to be resolute in demanding that the Government of Canada respect its agreement with Newfoundland and Labrador to provide fully \$280 million as its share of a \$400 million fisheries investment fund for industry development and renewal. Ottawa agreed to provide fully \$280 million for the fund as a condition of our acceptance of the elimination of minimum processing requirements in order to facilitate the **Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement**, known as CETA. Our government demands that Ottawa honour its covenant with Newfoundland and Labrador.

The future of the fishing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador is bright. Our government will continue to work closely with the seafood industry to **market local seafood** internationally, leading delegations to major trade missions in the United States, the European Union and Asia while bringing buyers here. We will also continue to support local awareness of our seafood products in collaboration with the province's Restaurant Association and the Association of Chefs and Cooks. We will continue to disseminate information on market prices, trends, market conditions, supply and demand, currency exchange rates, inventory levels and more. To assist the processing and harvesting sectors in negotiating raw material prices for various fish species, we will continue to work with the industry to ensure timely and relevant market information is made available to all parties in the collective bargaining process.

Our government is also proud to be supporting the **sealing industry** as it capitalizes on opportunities associated with seal processing. There is reason to be optimistic about the future of this sustainable and humane harvest, given the longstanding role of Carino Processing and the introduction this year of PhocaLux International as an additional player in this industry.

Last year, the government released the five-year Aquaculture Sustainable Management Strategy reflecting extensive consultations on the future of the **aquaculture industry**. The strategy confirms the province's commitment to work cooperatively with all stakeholders to ensure the industry's long-term growth through sustainable management, capacity support and R&D. In the ten years from 2003 to 2013, employment in the aquaculture industry grew fourfold to nearly 900 person years, and the GDP generated by the industry grew tenfold to more than \$100 million. With the strategy in place, that growth is just the start.

Our government also remains strongly committed to initiatives that will drive further growth in the **agriculture and forest industries**, which employ large numbers of people and generate significant economic activity. To promote food security in line with the vision of the Growing Forward initiative, our government will work with agrifoods producers to explore opportunities to make our province more reliant on local crops.

Our government will continue to leverage the strengths of our rural and urban areas, as well as our highly skilled workforce and well-developed infrastructure, to strategically market Newfoundland and Labrador as great place to live, work and do business. We will continue to use our strategic attributes to attract foreign investment and encourage companies to expand to our province.

Health and Safety

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Following the success of the Premier's Summit on Health Care, our government will continue to work with stakeholders, including health care professionals, patients and our regional health authorities, to improve the health and wellness of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We will explore ways to ensure our residents have better access to the services they need and are supported to make healthy decisions to enhance their physical and mental well-being by improving our health care system. A great focus will be placed on **primary health care**, particularly in the areas of health promotion and prevention, chronic disease management, mental health and addictions, and supports for our seniors as they age.

We will increase access to health services and improve both patient and health care provider satisfaction by working with our health professional governing bodies to facilitate all of our health care professionals working to their full scope of practice. In particular, following upon the recent expansion of the **pharmacist's scope of practice** to include the ability to administer medication via injection, we will work towards allowing pharmacists to prescribe for some defined minor ailments.

The mental and physical well-being of our population is a top priority. That is why we invest in health promotion and disease prevention initiatives, such as our publicly funded **immunization program**, which provides vaccines for children at no cost to their families. Our childhood vaccination program boasts a coverage rate of 95 per cent, the envy of other jurisdictions in the country. We will continue to offer cost-effective vaccines to help protect our children from childhood diseases.

Our government is acutely aware of the challenges some of our citizens face with **mental health and addictions** issues, and is committed to ensuring programs and services are in place for those who need them. Over the past five years, we have invested an additional \$60 million for mental health and addictions services. Because money is not always the answer, we need to look at all aspects of mental health and addictions services, including the prevention-to-aftercare continuum, and assess how best to improve the system for the future. That is why our government has established the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions and its review of the

system. Recommendations from the Committee will inform a new provincial Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. Our government continues to ensure innovative ways of accessing services. Our e-mental health program will be improved to help support families and children by reducing wait times for children with mild-to-moderate behavioural problems through the use of technology.

Health system effectiveness and sustainability are directly linked to the quality and efficiency of the health workforce. We are fortunate to have well-trained and competent health professionals who deliver safe, quality care to the people of our province. We will implement a **strategic health workforce plan** to consolidate existing initiatives and programs, including workforce projections, into a unified and strengthened provincial approach. The plan will help enhance the stability of the health workforce and improve the health care services provided to the residents of the province.

We remain more committed than ever to a fair and just society – to care for those who are vulnerable and to support those who face barriers to living full, equitable and healthy lives. Reducing poverty will continue to be among our government’s highest priorities. Since the province’s first **Poverty Reduction Strategy** Action Plan in 2006, our government has invested more than a billion dollars in poverty reduction initiatives to give people a step up from poverty to self-reliance. In just eight years, this approach has helped Newfoundland and Labrador reduce reliance on income support to the lowest level in our province’s history. We have engaged more than 1,000 people province-wide and followed with a Poverty Reduction Summit to gather recommendations that will inform our second Poverty Reduction Action Plan, which we will bring forward this year.

Our government is also developing an **Inclusion Action Plan** to deliver on the objectives of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. The Action Plan will outline concrete initiatives in five areas: changing how we think about disability, engaging people with disabilities, removing barriers from the built environment, enhancing access to disability-related supports and delivering services with dignity and respect.

Our government is focused on promoting healthy aging across the lifespan and fostering a healthy society which honours, listens to and includes seniors and older persons in building stronger, more dynamic communities. We are living longer lives, and we also want to live better lives.

Through our Provincial **Healthy Aging Policy Framework**, we are identifying actions we can take to address the particular needs seniors face.

The Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development will take the leadership role in developing an integrated, horizontal approach to wellness through the new **Provincial Wellness Plan**. Having taken a range of actions on matters from nutrition and fitness to tobacco control, our government will work with the Provincial Wellness Advisory Council and other partners on this new Provincial Wellness Plan. It will complement our primary health care system and build a coordinated provincial government approach across departments and sectors to advance the wellness of our population's health and to reduce disparities.

Healthy living means access to **housing**. Our government has received the independent consultant's report on homelessness entitled "A Road Map for Ending Homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador". The report offers a series of recommendations to consider. A steering committee representing the government and community-based organizations has been established to thoroughly review its recommendations and to map out an action plan. Our government will also continue to invest in affordable housing under a new five-year federal-provincial agreement.

Our **Foster a Future campaign** has been extremely successful since its implementation, and continues to create awareness surrounding the need for more foster parents who can provide safe and nurturing environments for our most vulnerable children and youth. To date, the campaign has resulted in the approval of 175 new placements in 115 foster homes. The government has worked to provide programming and residential placement for children and youth with complex emotional, medical and/or behavioural needs. We will build on this work in the year ahead.

Some families in Newfoundland and Labrador have complex needs. It is incumbent on the province to intervene to protect children who are being maltreated or abused by their parents. Our government recognizes the importance of ensuring that children and youth in out-of-home residential placements receive the best services possible. The protection and healthy development of our children and youth is paramount. Through the **Continuum of Care Strategy**, our government is striving to ensure children and youth in need of out-of-home care are being matched with placement options that best meet their specific needs. In the coming year, CYFS will continue to strengthen its policies and programs to ensure this province has one of the best child protection systems in the country.

Our province has been participating in a **Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group** to work on ways to address the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care across the country. The government has reached out to local Aboriginal governments and organizations for input on this initiative. A report will be presented to Premiers this summer when the Council of the Federation meets in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our government is very encouraged by the positive results of the one-year pilot project that brought two experienced child protection social workers into the Sheshatshiu office to serve as peer-support mentors. We are encouraged by the results of the Community of Natuashish Service Enhancement Program (CONSEP), which sees social workers flying into Natuashish on two-week rotations, and by Planning Circles, through which our officials and Aboriginal community leaders work together on strategies for the communities. A collaborative approach with community leaders is improving service delivery in **Aboriginal communities** as well as planning for the safety and well-being of children and youth. Challenges remain, and our government will be a willing partner to address substance abuse challenges that deeply concern all of us. Our government will continue to strengthen partnerships with the leaders of Aboriginal communities, particularly in Labrador, to deliver innovative approaches to child, youth and family services. We will continue to adapt our foster families training to better reflect Aboriginal communities and culture. We will work to identify additional foster homes that will enable children in need of out-of-home placement to remain within their community or closer to their home or community, to ensure continued connections with their culture.

Public safety in our communities and for our residents is a top priority. In January 2015, our government demonstrated its commitment to enhancing public safety through the creation of the **Premier's Advisory Council on Crime and Community Safety**. This Council will examine all aspects of crime in Newfoundland and Labrador and recommend new strategies to prevent and reduce criminal activity and enhance safety in the province.

Every member of our society has the right to live free from the fear of violence. Intimate partner and domestic violence is a very real and complex societal challenge impacting vulnerable women and children throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. This past year saw the establishment of the Intimate Partner Violence Initiative with the RNC and RCMP through additional dedicated resources. Our government has evaluated the piloted **Family Violence Intervention Court** that was in St. John's and intends to roll out a new court this year that will have a broader provincial reach.

In 2014-15, we invested significantly in the **Sheriff's Office**. As a testament to our commitment to safety, we introduced Point of Entry Security Screening at Family Court in St. John's and at the Corner Brook courthouse. Work will continue in the year ahead, in keeping with recommendations of the Sheriff's Office Review, to implement new Point of Entry Security Screening at Supreme Court Trial Division in St. John's.

The Roil Review commissioned by our government in 2014 recommended numerous amendments to the *Legal Aid Act*, including provisions relating to the size of the Board of Commissioners of the Legal Aid Commission, and prescribing a tariff rate by regulations. In keeping with our commitment to fully implement the Review recommendations, my government will introduce these and other improvements to the *Legal Aid Act* in the coming weeks.

In his 2013 report entitled, "Access to Justice – A Roadmap for Change", Supreme Court of Canada Justice Thomas Cromwell noted a strong need to improve access to civil and family justice in Canada, particularly for the most vulnerable in our society. As a means of improving access to justice for all participants in the court process in this province, our government will ensure that the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador is properly resourced to revise its **Rules of Court** in 2015-16. These have not been modernized since 1986. The outcome will be a more simplified court process; faster, more user-friendly access to court services; and a resolution process proportionate to the complexity of the matter before the court. Self-represented litigants, in particular, will benefit from revisions in the Rules of Court when engaging on their own behalf in the court process.

Responsible and Responsive Governance

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

There are many other things the government might have chosen to do this year if it were not faced with the unprecedented and unanticipated drop in revenue caused by the precipitous drop in the price of oil. But responsible governance demands fiscal prudence. In this year's budget, our Finance Minister will present a plan to return Newfoundland and Labrador to a **balanced budget in 2020-2021**.

Having negotiated a solution to provide stability to the Public Service Pension Plan, our government will follow through with the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association on the agreement in principle to bring financial sustainability to the **Teachers' Pension Plan**.

Having consulted with more than 500 stakeholders, our government this year will announce a new **Provincial-Municipal Fiscal Framework** to provide efficient and effective ways for sustainable services to be delivered, paid for and shared in the province.

Our government is preparing to modernize the *Lands Act*, and make the Crown lands application process simpler and the service delivery model more effective. This will be informed by a comprehensive review, the consultation component of which is nearing completion.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the province's youth and the agencies that serve them have opportunities to inform the government's programs, services, policies and decisions. Building on a number of interactive learning events, workshops, town-halls, schools-based activities and online engagement sessions held across the province in recent years, our government recently re-launched the **Premier's Youth Advisory Committee**. Twenty-three high school, post-secondary and workforce-aged individuals were appointed in early 2015 after a province-wide expression of interest process generated 71 applications. The newly mandated Premier's Youth Advisory Committee is tasked with developing policy- and decision-making advice and submitting it directly to the government. Our government is eager and determined to work collaboratively with the people it serves.

Better collaboration is the key to promoting provincial and regional prosperity. Our government's Office of Public Engagement will launch a new **Social Innovation / Collaboration Incentive Fund** to bring together diverse partners across all sectors – business, labour, community, academia and government – to collaborate on innovative projects that demonstrate new and effective ways of working together on common or complementary goals.

Our government is developing Newfoundland and Labrador's first **Open Government Action Plan**, reflecting the best 'open government' practices in the world. The plan will nurture a culture of openness within the government by promoting access to information and data and enhanced dialogue and collaboration on initiatives. Under this plan, Newfoundland and Labrador will become, by 2020, one of the most open and accessible jurisdictions anywhere in the world.

Our government will bring forward, as its first Bill, the strongest **Access to Information and Protection of Privacy** legislation anywhere in Canada, reflecting in their entirety the recommendations that the Honourable Clyde Wells, Ms. Jennifer Stoddart and Mr. Doug Letto submitted in March. Our government commends the review committee members for their outstanding work.

Our Premier is driving a process to **reform the House of Assembly** by enhancing the roles of individual Members, reviewing the compensation of Members who hold special positions in the legislature, reviewing MHA pensions, reducing the number of seats and opening legislation to greater scrutiny. Newfoundland and Labrador led the country in legislative reform following the publication of "Rebuilding Confidence" in 2007, and we are ready to do even more to ensure the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are served by the most progressive legislature in the country.

We are **proud of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.**

- We are proud of people like teenagers T.J. Fitzpatrick, Justin Saunders and James Stapleton, who came to the rescue when flames engulfed a Marystown hotel and were instrumental in saving the lives of people caught up in the blaze.

- We are proud of people like Jiffy Cabs dispatcher Jay Dunn, who calmly talked a distraught dad through CPR to save the life of his 17-month-old child.
- We are proud of people like 911 dispatcher Shelley Kelly, who saved a Labrador West family suffering from deadly carbon monoxide poisoning by keeping the ailing mom alert and coaching her to get fresh air into the cabin before help arrived.
- We are proud of people like Desiree Foote, a new recruit with the St. George's Volunteer Fire Department, who – in a blizzard too severe for a fire truck – joined Captain Robbie Tobin on his ATV and sped to resuscitate an unconscious man who had suffered a heart attack.

There are no finer people on the face of the Earth than Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They deserve nothing but the best.

Our government is **buoyed with optimism** as our people begin to come into their own, enjoying the highest levels of income ever in our history, employment levels that are higher than a decade ago, and a vast array of initiatives that enhance the lives of the oldest to the youngest among us. Our government is managing the affairs of the province responsibly, progressively and sustainably to ensure the incredible gains we have already achieved are eclipsed only by the phenomenal gains that we are about to bring to fruition. Newfoundland and Labrador is stronger today than it has ever been, and we are on course to achieve goals that will benefit our people for generations to come. Our government is filled with confidence and optimism that the prospects for Newfoundland and Labrador, both in the short term and over the long term, are incredibly bright. Ours is a future that knows no bounds, and we shall ever remain resolute in defence of this province we so dearly love – Newfoundland and Labrador, proud and strong.

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Estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty. I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session. May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberation.

