

# Speech from the Throne

## *Getting the Job Done*

**First session of the  
60<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick**

**The Honourable Brenda Murphy,  
Lieutenant-Governor**

**November 17, 2020**



# Speech from the Throne 2020

## Opening Remarks

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests, and most importantly, the people of New Brunswick, welcome to the First Session of the 60th Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick.

We gather today on the ancestral territory of our indigenous people.

This session opens in the midst of unprecedented times, when our province and indeed the entire world, continues to face an unpredictable and prolonged global health pandemic. Amidst it all, New Brunswickers have proven to be resilient and strong. The people of the province have come together, working collaboratively to flatten the curve of the COVID-19 pandemic and to keep one another and our province safe.

New Brunswick's efforts at slowing and preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus have been effective with one of the lowest rates of the disease in the world.

Your government recognizes and thanks the workers in every corner of the province who rose up when called upon. Thousands were on the front lines to help New Brunswickers transition to our new reality during COVID-19. Doctors, nurses and health-care professionals led the way to protect patients and keep vital services going. Nursing home workers demonstrated unwavering professionalism and compassion.

Emergency responders including police, paramedics and firefighters have ensured order and given reassurance. Our border control efforts have been staffed by highway safety officers, conservation officers, correctional officers and inspectors in the investigations section of the Department of Justice and Public Safety. They have been supplemented at peak times by public health inspectors, sheriffs, forest rangers and administrative services officers. Not only have they adjusted to new roles to protect our province's borders, they have defended the entire Atlantic bubble on the front lines every day.

Grocery store workers, pharmacists, office supply stores, technology installers and truck drivers have kept households and businesses up and running. Educators are finding new and innovative ways to teach and ensure our youngest minds continue to grow and learn.

As a result of this tremendous courage and determination, New Brunswick received positive reviews from across Canada for its handling of the pandemic and its early reopening of the economy. This success is a testament to the strong will of our people and their fortitude in the face of adversity. New Brunswickers must remain vigilant and work together to keep each other protected and to ensure our continued progress.

While the pandemic changed so much about our lives, it has also highlighted the importance of working together for the greater good.

Your government made the exceptional decision to establish a COVID-19 all-party cabinet committee to provide oversight and strategic direction to the work being done within government to safeguard New Brunswickers. The group includes the leaders of the recognized political parties in the Legislative Assembly, who we thank for their collaborative, non-partisan approach as the province deals with the impacts of COVID-19.

It is with this spirit of collaboration that your government will approach work in this session of the Legislative Assembly. Your government will apply lessons learned from the pandemic on how to deliver services more effectively, work more productively and to leverage technology. It will continue to move forward with a sense of urgency, clarity of goals and transparent communication that served the province so well in facing the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis.

Through it all, New Brunswick is restoring its sense of pride – here at home and within the nation. There is a renewed momentum with citizens working together to build a stronger and safer future for all. Your government intends to seize this opportunity to continue to lead New Brunswick into new beginnings.

### **Congratulations / Recognition**

A number of New Brunswickers have had noteworthy recognition and achievements since our last session of the legislature.

New Brunswick is home to the Royal Canadian Legion 2020-2021 National Silver Cross Mother, Mrs. Deborah Sullivan of Summerville. Her son, Lieutenant Christopher Edward Saunders was a decorated Naval Officer in the Royal Canadian Navy, who lost his life during a tragic fire while serving aboard the HMCS Chicoutimi in 2004.

Claudette Bradshaw of Moncton received the New Brunswick Human Rights Award for her work and exceptional leadership in helping families and children who are victims of discrimination based on social or family status.

Emma Coakley of Saint John received the Youth Human Rights Award for her dedication to raising awareness about amputation, prostheses, the War Amps and the PLAYSAFE program in her community.

Two New Brunswickers were appointed to the Order of Canada. They are Omer Chouinard of Moncton, for his efforts to protect ecosystems in the Maritimes as a professor of environmental studies; and Derek Lister of Fredericton, for his contributions to nuclear energy research and improvements to occupational safety.

New Brunswickers Peter Sawyer and Élizab eth Levasseur were among the recipients of the 2020 Council of the Federation Literacy Awards.

Milee Millea, of Elsipogtog First Nation was named "Difference Maker of the Year" by the Rick Hansen Foundation for raising awareness about missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

Michelle Lang Standing, of Rothesay won the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. She is a dedicated supporter and promoter of LGBTQ+ rights and focuses on creating more diverse and inclusive spaces for all students.

University of New Brunswick's Dr. Gary Waite of Fredericton was elected to the Royal Society of Canada. Dr. Waite is an internationally recognized historian and acting chair of UNB Fredericton's history and classics departments.

Mario Th eriacult from Moncton has been appointed chair of the board of directors of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

Cameron MacMaster received the Roly McLenahan Canada Games Award late last year after capturing the silver medal in the vault category during the Canada Winter Games. This was the first medal for Team New Brunswick in men's artistic gymnastics in 24 years.

Thirteen New Brunswick educators and groups received National Inclusive Education Awards this year. The awards are presented by the New Brunswick Association for Community Living, in partnership with the Canadian Association for Community Living. Award winners are: staff of the Chatham Day Care Center in Miramichi; Sheryl Titus of Quispamsis; Joanne Mclsaac of Woodstock; educational assistants at Keswick Valley Memorial School in Burtt's Corner; Wanda MacDonald of Saint John; Rhonda Magee and Ellen Higgins of Saint John; Robin Buchanan of Oromocto; the integrated services team at  cole Carrefour- tudiant in Beresford; students at  cole Les  claireurs in Fredericton; Marie-Jos e Couture of District Scolaire Francophone Nord Est; Steven Austin of Moncton; the welding faculty at NBCC Saint John; and staff at  cole Mgr-Lang in Drummond.

A number of New Brunswickers received special recognition from the Governor General's office earlier this year. Mackie Greene and the late Joseph Michael Howlett, of Wilson's Beach were awarded the Meritorious Service Cross for founding the Campobello Whale Rescue Team. Gerard Barry Losier of Miramichi was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for his philanthropy and for championing improved care for the elderly and those facing life-ending illnesses in the Miramichi region. Ralph Thomas of Saint John was awarded the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers for encouraging diversity and physical well-being through his work as an ambassador of the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame and founder of the New Brunswick Black History Society.

We also recognize Dr. Jennifer Russell for her leadership, guidance and advice as the province has navigated an unprecedented circumstance dealing with the impacts of a global pandemic.

Your government would also like to recognize two very important milestones this year. The Fergusson Foundation is celebrating its 35-year anniversary, and the Table de concertation pour contrer la violence conjugale et familiale dans la Péninsule acadienne is celebrating its 30th anniversary. Both of these organizations are committed to ending family violence in New Brunswick and have made incredible progress over the years.

This year, your government celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the report of The Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The federal commission was tasked to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in all aspects of Canadian society.

### **Condolences**

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

We honour Brenda Robertson, a pioneer for gender equality. She was elected in 1967 as the first female member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick. She became the province's first female minister, was re-elected four times and later went on to serve Canada for 20 years as a senator.

We remember Albert Levi, of Elsipogtog First Nation. Albert was a longstanding Chief of the Elsipogtog First Nation and was widely recognized as one of New Brunswick's most influential Indigenous leaders.

We remember Bill Gale, of Saint John. Bill was a former banking executive, and a dedicated philanthropist and anti-poverty advocate. Bill founded the Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative (BCAPI) and was a recipient of the Order of New Brunswick.

We honour James Albert Doyle, a longstanding educator and driving force behind the establishment of a St. Thomas University Campus in Miramichi. He represented the constituency of Miramichi-Bay du Vin from 1997 to 1999.

We remember Barbara Fisher-Townsend, of Nackawic. She was a researcher, teacher and author who dedicated her life to raising awareness about domestic violence towards women.

We remember Guy Cormier, mayor of Saint-Léolin, a dedicated and respected leader who worked tirelessly to make a difference in his community.

We also honour Pat Darrah of Saint John. He was a prominent leader in his community for 60 years. He was part of many key developments in the city including Market

Square, Harbour Station and Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick. Pat was a dedicated community activist and philanthropist.

We honour Roland Haché of Petit-Rocher. He was a longstanding member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, representing Nigadoo-Chaleur (now Restigouche-Chaleur) from 1999 to 2014. He first served as the mayor of Petit-Rocher from 1995 to 1999, then went on to serve provincially as the Minister of Education and Minister of Environment and Local Government.

This year, we lost Hans W. Klohn, a prominent Saint John business leader and philanthropist. He co-founded Ocean Steel with K.C. Irving in 1955 and was inducted in the New Brunswick Business Hall of Fame in 2011. He supported many organizations in the community, including the Saint John Boys and Girls Club and Romero House.

We remember Saint John rowing legend and former journalist Ed Winchester. Ed won a gold medal in the men's lightweight pair competition at the 2000 World Rowing Championships and was an inspirational force in New Brunswick's rowing community.

We remember R.M. Vaughan of Saint John. He was a talented writer, and a mentor to many aspiring artists. He had recently moved back to New Brunswick to be the artist-in-residence at the University of New Brunswick.

## **Introduction**

This is a critical turning point for New Brunswick, and your government is prepared to seize it. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, your government's vision for a better economic future has not changed.

Before the pandemic struck, many actions were taken to restore the province to financial health. Significant gains made our province more attractive to outside investment and positioned the province for sustainability and growth. That successful work has lessened the financial impact of COVID-19, which underscores the importance of building fiscal flexibility and being disciplined during stable economic times.

Your government is committed to continue managing finances responsibly, and during these unprecedented times, your government maintained its existing spending obligations as foreseen prior to COVID-19, while also dealing with the impacts of the crisis.

Despite the fact that uncertainty remains, and COVID-19 related expenditures are significant, the amount of over-expenditure to date has been mitigated due to the commitment of New Brunswickers to limit the spread of the virus by upholding public health guidance.

Second quarter projections for the 2020-2021 fiscal year show a deficit of \$183.3 million compared to the budgeted surplus of \$92.4 million.



The net debt is projected to reach \$14.1 billion, an increase of \$386.9 million over budget.

Revenue is projected to be \$40.3 million lower than budget mainly due to anticipated impacts related to COVID-19. This is largely attributed to decreased projections for provincial taxes, agency revenues and sale of goods and services, offset by federal funding including the Safe Restart Agreement, the Safe Return to Class Fund, and the essential workers wage top-up.

With lower revenues anticipated, your government will renew and reinvent how public services are delivered so better value is given to the residents of New Brunswick while at the same time living within our means. This discipline will be essential so that the government has the resources required to care for seniors and invest in health care, ensure more money for vulnerable people who need it, and for our children who deserve a strong education.

New approaches will be required to bring about positive change, and many improvements have already taken hold. Everyone must do their part to ensure New Brunswick remains strong during and after COVID-19, as there is much work ahead of us.

New Brunswick continues to face persistent issues of poverty where approximately 25 per cent of our children live in poverty and close to 34 per cent of New Brunswick households have incomes so low that they cannot pay taxes. In Canada, our province remains one of the least literate. It is also home to the most rapidly aging population. The issues are complex, multi-faceted, and will require innovative solutions.

Your government understands how to navigate tough headwinds and has demonstrated it is ready to grapple with challenges and meet them head on. This resolve is further strengthened by a committed and aligned public service, whose talents were brought to bear during our response to COVID-19 and who we continue to rely on each day to serve citizens. They are highly skilled, committed and driven to show New Brunswickers a government that can continually improve.

### **Rising to the Challenge – Supporting New Brunswickers During the Pandemic**

Your government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how New Brunswick can rise to the challenge.

Beginning in March 2020, a series of extraordinary measures were set in motion within New Brunswick to contain the spread of COVID-19. On March 16, schools and non-essential government services were closed. A State of Emergency declaration on March 19 shuttered non-essential in-person retail sales, limited food and beverage business services, ordered workplaces reduced to critical functions and closed most public and private institutions to public visitors.

Pre-COVID-19, your government was on a steady path to make our province more attractive by improving the province's credit rating, addressing rising WorkSafe premiums, and managing federal tax increases that would have hurt businesses. Thanks to a number of steps your government took to strengthen the province's finances, New Brunswick was better positioned going into the pandemic, enabling a number of critical financial supports for impacted businesses.

Business Navigators began answering calls the same day of the emergency declaration and have since resolved more than 4,000 calls from the business community. Hundreds of businesses were supported with resources, information and education as they sought to adjust operations and reopen safely.

Your government announced up to \$50 million in working capital loans for businesses to provide immediate assistance to small, medium and large employers negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Your government established the NB Workers Emergency Income Benefit to provide a one-time income benefit of \$900 to individuals who lost their job due to the state of emergency in NB and applied for the income support under the Government of Canada COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. This income support helped bridge the gap between when they lost their employment or closed their business, and when they received their federal benefit. This resulted in a provincial expenditure of approximately \$40 million.

Grants of \$500 to \$10,000 were made available to small- and medium-sized non-profits as part of the COVID-19 Community Investment Fund for non-profits impacted by COVID-19.

Interest and principal payment deferrals were made available for companies with loans from government departments. WorkSafeNB premiums were deferred for three months without interest charges.

Late penalties on property taxes were waived on a case-by-case basis, and New Brunswick corporate income tax payments were deferred up to August 31, 2020.

Electricity bill payments were deferred and service disconnections for non-payment were suspended by NB Power, Saint John Power and the City of Edmundston.

Amendments to the *Employment Standards Act* were made retroactive to March 12 to ensure job protection measures for those unable to work due to the COVID-19 virus.

A job match platform and virtual career fairs were organized to connect employers and workers.



New Brunswick partnered with the federal government to support the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance to provide rent relief for New Brunswick's small businesses.

Strong measures were established to engage critical infrastructure operators to mitigate and respond to supply chain impacts resulting from COVID-19.

These tremendous efforts demonstrate that your government has managed the uncertainty extremely well by protecting the provincial economy during these challenging times. In August, Statistics Canada noted that New Brunswick had witnessed the most complete employment recovery of all provinces.

### **Economic and Social Recovery and Resilience**

Your government is tracking New Brunswick's economic recovery performance by examining key metrics, and to date, they demonstrate the underlying strength of our handling of the pandemic as well as the determination of New Brunswickers to keep the economy open and progressing forward.

Employment, as defined by Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey is currently at 97.7 per cent of the level of employment seen in February. Compared to other provinces, New Brunswick now has the third most complete job recovery behind Newfoundland and Labrador, and Manitoba.

Building permits as measured by Statistics Canada are showing September was the second-best month of the year behind July and marks the first time this year that permits have seen a year-over-year increase. Building permits are now 29 per cent above the level seen in February. Momentum over the last three months has been solid and provides optimism of increased activity in the months ahead.

Retail sales as measured by Statistics Canada have shown a quick recovery since the reopening of the economy. New Brunswick is at almost 104 per cent of the level we were in February and are at 38 per cent above the low point experienced in April. New Brunswick is posting the fourth best performance in August behind Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba and Quebec.

The food services sector was one of the hardest hit parts of the economy. Sales have improved in each of the last three months, however the sector is operating at 87 per cent of the level seen in August 2019. New Brunswick has the third most complete recovery behind Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Real estate sales are hitting records in both volume and pricing.

To further support the safe and effective reopening of the economy, your government is partnering with the Government of Canada through the federal-provincial Safe Restart Agreement, which aims to reopen the economy and minimize the impact of potential

future waves of COVID-19, with a focus on immediate needs in the next six to eight months. New Brunswick will receive \$218 million of support to meet the needs of critical areas of health care, child care, municipalities, and vulnerable members of our population. The municipalities stream is a 50-50 cost share with the province.

Through this program, the Department of Social Development is investing \$15.2 million to assist vulnerable populations impacted by the pandemic. The department will invest the funding into three main sectors: long-term care facilities, child welfare and emergency shelters.

Your government will continue to work with the federal government and local partners to support vulnerable populations across the province to protect public health, and a safe and open economy.

### **Reinventing New Brunswick**

The early and ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic has New Brunswickers looking at our province with renewed energy – it's a sense of pride not seen in this province in decades. It's a pride that comes from knowing that together, New Brunswickers are agile and continue to adapt quickly to very adverse conditions. With focus and determination, the people of this province are achieving impressive results.

It's not only New Brunswickers who have rediscovered our province in our response to COVID-19. Others across the country and the world have responded with interest and admiration. This momentum is real and your government intends to magnify it by applying our lessons learned from COVID-19 on how to be more collaborative, more effective and more competitive.

Your government invites all New Brunswickers to engage and keep asking - *just how good can we be?* Collectively, we must challenge ourselves to think differently about ways of working, like citizens did in responding to COVID-19. For example, with so much interest in New Brunswick from outside of our province, coupled with our aggressive work to attract newcomers to fill our labour market needs, your government must ask the fundamental question about our airports. Is our existing infrastructure meeting the needs of travellers to and from New Brunswick, and is it meeting the needs of the business community and university students who want to call New Brunswick home? Why, when compared with Nova Scotia, does New Brunswick have such a different volume of air passengers? While Nova Scotia has approximately 25 per cent more population than New Brunswick, it has three times the passengers through Halifax than the three biggest airports in New Brunswick combined. What are the barriers? What are the qualities our province must possess to attract more growth? What silos must be torn down? These are the kinds of critical questions your government intends to ask, to encourage evidence-based decision making in any long-term decisions that will impact our province's potential.

It is clear New Brunswickers can excel. The Dr. Georges-L. Dumont University Hospital Centre in Moncton has demonstrated tremendous leadership on testing during COVID-19. What lessons have been learned about cooperation within our health-care system?

What would happen if New Brunswick could expand food production and make a greater contribution to world markets? The province is already a global leader in seafood, blueberries, potatoes, frozen foods and more.

When it comes to energy, New Brunswick has a very real opportunity to become a world leader in small modular nuclear reactor research, development, and manufacturing, which could change the course of energy innovation globally.

This is a time to stay focused. It's a time to build – to build on the steps which have been taken to restore our province's financial health. To build on the innovation in service delivery in health care and education. To build an economy that prospers and defies narrow thinking. To build a society in which no New Brunswicker gets left behind.

New Brunswickers must be as determined to build a thriving economy and growing labour force as they have been in fighting COVID-19 together. Your government and its citizens must not settle for less than excellence when it comes to our children receiving the best possible education, and our citizens having access to quality health care. It is a time to reinvent New Brunswick, and your government is more confident than ever that it can be done.

## **Government Priorities**

Your government has a plan to continue to build on the progress that has been made, to keep our forward momentum going.

The government is focused on six priorities:

- Energizing the Private Sector;
- Vibrant and Sustainable Communities;
- Dependable Public Health Care;
- World-Class Education;
- Affordable, Responsive and High-Performing Government;
- Environment

In this session of the Legislative Assembly, progress will be made in each of these priority areas. Each has measurable goals and the results will be made public to ensure transparency and accountability.

## **Energizing the Private Sector**

In January 2020, your government unveiled a new 10- to 20-year vision for a renewed Economic Strategy: *Closing the Gap in One Generation*, which aims to close the prosperity gap between New Brunswick and the rest of Canada. It was the culmination

of a series of engagements with the private sector to identify how to close the economic gap that exists between New Brunswick and the rest of the country. Experts from around the province, around the country and the world were engaged to identify ways our province could compete more effectively. Advisors from academia, business and technology were consulted, as were economists, municipal leaders, sector groups and other business leaders.

These consultations identified specific challenges facing New Brunswick's economy, including: a lack of scale and economic integration required to compete in an evolving economic landscape, the rural/urban – north/south mindset that hampers growth potential, slow technology adoption and business investment, and changes in global market conditions and environmental concerns facing our traditional resource-based industries.

While much has changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our vision for a better economic future should not. To address these challenges, five strategic objectives were identified:

First, New Brunswick must increase private sector investment. Over the last decade, New Brunswick has largely relied on the public sector for economic growth. Job growth, investment and real GDP growth have all been largely supported by the public sector. This is not sustainable, and it will not lead to positive economic results. After an extended period of weakness, private investment has shown improvement in recent years with 2018 hitting a 10-year high. At the same time, we have returned public sector investment to a sustainable level. The realities of COVID-19 have impacted these levels and will continue to challenge our near-term success, but government remains committed to this long-term strategic objective.

New Brunswick must also increase productivity. Closing the gap between New Brunswick and the rest of the Atlantic region would be the equivalent of adding nearly \$3 billion to the New Brunswick economy. Every dollar in increased productivity would lead to \$636 million in increased economic activity in New Brunswick - that's without the creation of any new jobs.

Next, New Brunswick will diversify and grow exports. Nationally 5 per cent of companies export, while in New Brunswick it's 3 per cent. New Brunswick exports are very much commodity-based at the moment and this makes us vulnerable to economic shifts.

Your government will also increase immigration and repatriation to grow the population base. Approximately 120,000 jobs will be available over the next decade. Bringing New Brunswickers home and attracting newcomers to address this gap will be essential.

Together with increasing private sector investment, increasing productivity, diversifying and growing exports, and increasing immigration and repatriation New Brunswick will create the foundation for economic recovery and growth which will culminate in an increase in GDP.

The strategy is taking hold. Under a renewed mandate, Opportunities New Brunswick is supporting businesses across the province to adopt new technologies for productivity and embrace digital connections to international markets.

Manufacturers are embracing technology in new ways. Waska Cedar Shingles in Clair has invested in building the world's first fully-automated cedar shingle manufacturing facility. This has resulted in lower production costs, reduced energy usage, enhanced efficiency, and most importantly, a significant improvement in employee safety. Automation, artificial intelligence and robotics are fundamental pathways to addressing looming demographic and labour force challenges.

Bouctouche Bay Industries is a COVID-19 success story – an aquaculture company that worked with Dalhousie University to pivot to produce Health Canada Approved Class 1 PPE face shields. Based on a design from Dalhousie, the company was able to quickly retool and begin production thanks to a partnership with Sure Grip Hand Controls in Upper Kingsclear.

To support the attraction of private investment, new talent and diversified trade and exports, Opportunities New Brunswick is partnering with the Indo-Canadian Business Chamber (ICBC). ICBC works to strengthen and promote trade, commerce, and economic opportunities between India and Canada. The province is working to build on its track record of attracting India-based companies to New Brunswick. HCL Technologies Inc., Tech Mahindra, Aditya Birla Group and Sedin Technologies are examples of world-leading companies that now have operations in the province. Many of these companies have also relocated skilled workers, supporting overall population growth initiatives.

Your government's Economic Growth and Action Plan also identifies a new province-wide digital broadband connectivity initiative to accelerate universal access and improve speeds. This has become all the more essential to deliver online education, virtual health and to attract remote workers.

Investment in digital broadband connectivity will support your government's work to build emerging sectors for long-term economic prosperity in cybersecurity, energy innovation, and digital health. By being focused on emerging sectors, the province will attract new foreign investment, build on local expertise, and grow employment opportunities.

One of these emerging sectors is energy innovation. Energy as we know it is shifting to more renewables and non-emitting technologies. Your government has a vision that New Brunswick can develop technology that will put our province – and our entire country – back on the map as a global emissions reduction leader.

Small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) have tremendous potential to generate safe, clean and low-cost energy for both on-grid and off-grid communities. If New Brunswick

can develop advanced SMRs right here at home and achieve just 1 per cent of the estimated Canadian market, it would mean \$190 million in annual direct and indirect impacts to New Brunswick. The province has an under-utilized supply chain that, if activated as part of this strategy, could participate in a worldwide SMR market and bring that revenue back to New Brunswick.

Energizing the private sector will also involve growing Indigenous participation in the economy by supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses, encouraging partnerships, and understanding and addressing employment challenges to increase labour market participation.

While your government looks long-term, it must also protect and support existing pillars of our economy. Tourism typically employs between 30,000 and 40,000 New Brunswickers and contributes more than \$520 million to the provincial GDP every year. The industry has risen to the challenge, demonstrating the customary grace and grit that New Brunswickers are known for. In every corner of the province, entrepreneurial ideas have taken shape. Your government applauds and thanks those steadfast and persevering visionaries and small business owners.

The Explore NB travel incentive program government introduced this summer with the support of industry advisors has been heralded by tourism associations across the country and spurred real results; generating over \$17 million in spending in just two and a half months.

That's why your government has committed to reoffering it in the weeks to come. Your government will continue to encourage entrepreneurial and innovative thinking to strengthen our tourism sector, even in the face of a global pandemic and reduced travel, so that when the world begins to right itself and people start exploring again, New Brunswick will be ready – to deliver world-class experiences, host with pride and claim the title of most sought-after destination in Canada.

## **Vibrant and Sustainable Communities**

Creating vibrant and sustainable communities will require collaboration and fresh thinking.

New Brunswick has a fragmented governance system with 104 local governments and 236 Local Service Districts, as well as 12 Regional Service Commissions.

Local government representatives have identified many challenges, including the imbalance in property taxation, the unsustainable nature of rising costs of service, the lack of regional approaches in many areas of the province, and the lack of elected representation for citizens living in local service districts. Local governments intimately understand the issues they face every day in offering New Brunswickers services that they want and need as part of their quality of life.

Your government intends to have a new conversation with citizens of this province about ways to improve a system that has its roots in the 1960s. There have been dozens of studies highlighting the need for reforms, and it's time to move to action and implementation.

As stakeholders are engaged, your government will be transparent and seek to ultimately empower regions and communities all across New Brunswick. Above all, citizens will be the top priority.

Your government has worked with the City of Saint John to put in place a very ambitious action plan, and significant progress has been made on many fronts. Of particular note is the work done by a community group, led by Paulette Hicks, Cathy Simpson and David Campbell, who came together a year ago to look at new ways and ideas of boosting our approach for growth. As engaged citizens, they agreed it was time to evaluate a regional solution for economic development efforts and oversight. This has resulted in the full agreement of the local municipalities and the City of Saint John to a new regional agency that will take the lead on strategic investment in economic development, people attraction, infrastructure development, and tourism promotion and development.

It is this kind of leadership and regional cooperation that your government will encourage across the province, building on lessons learned in the Greater Saint John area.

Your government will also bring forth amendments to add a list of criteria that arbitrators will be required to consider during arbitrations for police and firefighters and implement procedural changes. This proposal is being sought by New Brunswick municipalities to ensure fairness in arbitration while taking into account the fiscal constraints faced by local governments.

Your government will also introduce legislation to eliminate the Assessment Gap Exemption to return these properties to real and true market value assessments. Service New Brunswick will apply the existing 10 per cent Spike Protection Mechanism to the affected Assessment Gap properties until the Assessment Gap is eliminated. Nearly 90 per cent of these additional revenues will benefit local governments and local service districts.

Creating vibrant and sustainable communities requires local leadership on community growth plans. Your government has been focused on growing our population. Last year labour force and employment both grew at rates not seen in a decade. The province added more than 4,000 people and that growth was driven almost exclusively by new Canadians.

At the State of the Province address last January, your government announced that it has a goal of attracting 10,000 people per year by 2027. To meet those aggressive



targets, communities will need to work harder at retention, be more creative in finding workers, and create the conditions for growth in our province.

Those conversations are taking hold in our communities, driven by our community leaders and employers. You see it in Saint-Quentin, Chipman and St. George. These are great examples of communities that are taking charge of their destiny with tailor-made growth plans. They are attracting people and enticing them to stay.

The government will also continue working toward the targets laid out in the 2014-2017 New Brunswick Francophone Immigration Action Plan to have a two per cent annual increase in French-speaking newcomers. Their goal is to reach 33 per cent by 2024.

The *Official Languages Act* will be reviewed next year. Your government will undertake a comprehensive review of the Act to help ensure the equality of our linguistic communities.

Your government understands that New Brunswick has a significant population growth challenge and is not able to meet current demands, especially in areas like health care. As such, communities across the province cannot afford to lose talented, and in many cases, highly specialized individuals.

Government will foster a constructive and open discussion to ensure that existing barriers and potential solutions for language proficiency and professional equivalency accreditation are fully understood. Government wants all children to have greater opportunities to learn both languages, while also finding ways to welcome highly-skilled newcomers, as well as New Brunswickers who wish to move back home and contribute to our collective success.

Communities can only thrive when they are inclusive of all citizens. Through the national housing strategy, your government is working on affordable housing solutions to repair existing housing stock, build new affordable units, and create mixed housing to encourage social inclusion.

During this session, your government will be amending the *Family Law Act* to modernize child support re-calculation services. Your government will also hold legislative hearings regarding accessibility in New Brunswick for people living with disabilities.

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, last year your government announced the formation of an All Nations and Parties Working Group on Truth and Reconciliation. Your government will continue this important work.

The government will also be responding to the work carried out by the Commission of the Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

## **Dependable Public Health Care**

New Brunswickers must have access to dependable public health care. Currently, our province faces a number of challenges in health care, including a lack of human resources and non-optimal use of resources.

Your government has a plan and is taking steps to tackle these issues and others facing the health-care system.

Improving access to primary care remains a priority. This will only be possible if citizens begin to think differently about service delivery and if everyone commits to becoming more collaborative and innovative. Your government will leverage all resources within the health-care network in new ways, from doctors to pharmacists, and nursing professionals across the province. A good example of how the province can become more effective is the establishment of nurse practitioner clinics that will open in the coming year in Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton, giving 16,000 more residents access to primary care.

During the pandemic, technology was leveraged for virtual appointments, and at peak, saw over 85 per cent of doctor appointments move to phone or video, proving that our people can operate differently and more effectively.

Access to medical information remains a commitment. Earlier this month your government announced a new province-wide initiative to ensure that breast density results are included in mammography reports and in the letters sent to women following routine screening.

Government will continue to optimize the use of resources across the health-care system. A province-wide action plan will demonstrate the effectiveness of new process improvements around access to surgical specialists, surgical capacity, scheduling, and technology use for pre- and post-operative care. This work supports the goal to reduce excessive wait times greater than one year for hip and knee replacement surgeries by 50 per cent by May 2021. Wait times for hip and knee replacement surgery are still too long in New Brunswick. While the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in set backs in wait times for hip and knee replacement surgeries, these wait times are being addressed, with the ultimate goal of ensuring more surgeries are performed within the national benchmark for wait times of six months or less.

Your government is building a comprehensive five-year action plan on mental health and addictions to augment existing facilities with walk-in services, to enhance a province-wide network of mental health and addictions experts while leveraging technology, and to place a critical focus on drug prevention and enforcement.

Health risks associated with vaping, especially for young people, are a rising concern. Government will work with health specialists and advocates to develop a strategy to combat youth vaping in New Brunswick.

Importantly, your government is focused on allowing our seniors to age in place by working with extra-mural caregivers and local communities to optimize health care delivery and supports for seniors, especially in rural New Brunswick where access can be challenging.

## **World-Class Education**

Re-imagining New Brunswick's education system is well underway. Over the last year your government has consulted broadly with teachers, parents and students to identify ways to improve. Government strives for a system that will empower teachers, increase student resiliency, and ensure a high-quality education for all young New Brunswickers.

Your government will continue to advance the opportunities identified in *Succeeding at Home: a green paper on education in New Brunswick*. Educating children and youth is the most important challenge facing any society.

Your government is committed to ensuring resources and programs are in place so that children can reach their full potential. This includes language skills. As a bilingual province, the education system must do a better job at ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn both languages for their future success and to create a more level playing field for opportunities. Your government wants every child to thrive, and that includes having the ability to work, live and fully participate in bilingual New Brunswick. Your government is committed to better understanding the barriers in our existing system and to working with all New Brunswickers to forge a more productive path forward.

Modernizing the educational system will also remain a focus both in programming and delivery. During the pandemic, the education system was tested. One of the most visible lessons during COVID-19 was that schools need to be better prepared to transition to a world of blended learning. Having the proper tools and resources for schools in place is critical to make this happen. Your government will continuously work to ensure schools have the support they require to deliver excellence.

During the pandemic, government invested over \$800,000 to equip students with laptops and connectivity. Government also offered subsidies to support families with the cost of technology. Learning in these modern times requires more than having access to a computer. It requires creating an education system where students can access a variety of tools online to make their learning more personalized to their specific interests.

The challenge is also to design an education system that lets students build their critical thinking skills through more engaging experiential learning. With that aim, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development recently signed a collaboration agreement for the 2020-2021 school year with the Atlantic Canada Aerospace and Defence Association. Through this partnership, students will be exposed

to career paths they might not have considered before, while also increasing their engagement with and connection to their community.

Without a good foundation in literacy, all of our other efforts will be compromised. Improving literacy rates across the province will continue to be a priority.

The pandemic demonstrated the critical importance of the early childhood sector. Your government is grateful for the overwhelming support demonstrated by professionals in this sector. New Brunswick opened daycares earlier than most across the country, and that was essential to kickstarting the economy by allowing parents to get back to work. It was also essential for the ongoing social and emotional development of our children.

Early childhood educators are critical, and your government will continue to find new ways to support them and to strengthen this sector of our education system, and our economy. To this end, earlier this month the federal and provincial governments signed a one-year Early Learning and Child Care Agreement to create and support more high quality, affordable child care. The agreement allocates nearly \$10 million in 2020–2021 for early learning and child care investments in New Brunswick.

Specifically, the provincial government will continue to collaborate with the child-care sector and maintain the New Brunswick Early Learning Centres designation. This will assist the province in moving toward the goal of having access to high-quality, affordable child care for all families in both official languages by 2030.

Your government will also work to improve the *Early Childhood Services Act*, in relation to licensing and revocation process for daycares. Our work will be guided by best practices and operational experiences learned since the Act was proclaimed in 2018.

Your government also recognizes the importance of teaching the next generation to embrace a more diverse and inclusive mindset. In recognition of the historical and contemporary significance and importance of Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy and Wolastoqey languages within New Brunswick, the government is committed to fostering meaningful partnerships with First Nations communities to expand the availability and quality of these courses within provincial schools.

### **Affordable, Responsive and High-Performing Government**

Your government's goal is to provide responsible and good government by tackling financial challenges head on and continually improving service delivery. While the realities of the pandemic have substantially adjusted the province's financial picture, government will continue to make improvements that drive efficiencies and maximize resources.

Public servants have proven they are agile and flexible, adjusting to different roles as needed to keep our province safe. They have also modified service delivery to leverage technology.

A number of services have been moved online which reduces costs and also offers added flexibility. This will continue with the online driver's licence test soon to be launched by Service New Brunswick.

Your government is also being very responsive to citizen and business needs. Earlier this month, the New Brunswick First Procurement Strategy and Action Plan was officially launched. It recognizes that public procurement can play an important role in economic development by creating more opportunities for growth and increasing the percentage of purchase orders awarded to New Brunswick suppliers.

It is a strategy to help New Brunswick businesses do more business with the New Brunswick government. There are four key objectives for the strategy including: maximizing the awards to New Brunswick businesses, introducing best value and innovative procurement practices, supporting strategic supplier development, and streamlining procurement policy and legislation.

The New Brunswick public service has an important role to play in developing and achieving the government's vision for the future of the province and maintaining a strong focus on affordability and responsiveness. Through their response to the pandemic, they have demonstrated they are up to the challenge.

Increasingly, government is operating cross-functionally with multi-disciplinary teams to develop broad solutions and accelerate implementation. Technology use is on the rise as teams seek to be leaders in the digital workplace. Performance is tracked and reported transparently, with metrics for accountability and ongoing collaboration. There is a culture shift taking hold which was accelerated by the pandemic and which will continue as the public service rises to meet our tremendous potential in New Brunswick.

## **Environment**

Your government has prioritized the environment through tangible actions and real progress. In the spring budget, your government allocated \$36 million to invest in climate change initiatives. These dollars are being invested in energy efficiency programs such as upgrading buildings and infrastructure with green technology and making sure that communities have the tools they need to plan for and adapt to flooding.

Your government also invested a record \$9.1 million from the Environmental Trust Fund.

The government created the Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship Standing Committee, which is a permanent, all-party committee.

New Brunswick has also successfully reduced its carbon emissions by 28 per cent since 2005 and is on track to meet its share of the national target of bringing emissions 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Your government released its plan to reduce industrial greenhouse gas emissions entitled  *Holding Large Emitters Accountable: New Brunswick's Output-Based Pricing System* . This pricing system will cover roughly half of all greenhouse gas emissions in the province and requires large emitters to reduce their emissions intensity by 10 per cent by 2030.

This session, your government will introduce amendments to the  *Climate Change Act*  to allow for the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions from New Brunswick's large emitters.

Your government is also focused on developing natural resources in a responsible manner. New Brunswick is widely recognized for its world-class forestry management system – a sector that is vital to our province's economy. Increased conservation efforts are advancing through meaningful consultation with First Nations and groups across the province. All of these efforts are contributing to what will be a broadly-supported forest management plan for Crown lands.

The government is doubling conserved and protected areas in the province from 4.6 per cent to 10 per cent, which marks the largest conservation gain in the history of New Brunswick. The new area is the equivalent of 19 Fundy National Parks dedicated to conservation. It allows the province to maintain a bio-diverse and ecologically sustainable forest where it can target specific areas of improvement for wildlife habitat, protected waterways, and better tracking and measurement of increases in fish and wildlife populations.

In July of this year, the Canadian Wildlife Federation recognized New Brunswick for our leadership in conservation.

Your government will continue to encourage the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts and stewards of the environment. It will enhance online curriculum for hunter safety and education and will continue to improve real-time information about Crown lands, fish and game for a mobile and connected next generation.

Your government understands that steps must be taken to clean up our environment.

Recycling will continue to be a focus, with government encouraging expanded glass recycling to help eliminate more glass waste from the landfills, which will ultimately save taxpayers money and help protect and enhance our natural environments.

Your government has embraced a ban on single-use plastic bags. It will be phased-in over the coming years as our economy continues to strengthen. The government will work closely with industry and other stakeholders to identify the best path forward.

Government is also committed to holding major producers responsible to recycle packaging and paper products. The Extended Producer Pay Program was announced in 2019 and draft regulation will be brought forward in the very near future to have industry develop and implement their programs following a regulation feedback period. Once the program is in place, New Brunswickers will be able to recycle more products from their homes, buildings and schools.

Protecting the environment will ensure New Brunswick's rich and vast natural spaces can be enjoyed by generations to come.

## **Conclusion**

New Brunswick is moving forward with confidence, boosted by the momentum that continues to build in our province.

We are moving forward with a sense of urgency and focus to tackle our collective challenges because we know we can be better.

We understand there will be a time when the pandemic will end, and we must be ready to emerge stronger.

We've rediscovered all that is possible when we work together and are determined to succeed.

Our future can be one where we begin to lead the nation in new ways. Where our bold moves attract attention from leaders across the country, private investors and top talent.

Where our people are energized, innovative and performing at their best.

Where our quality of life attracts newcomers who are embraced with opportunities to build careers, contribute to world-class research, and thrive in our growing economy.

Where New Brunswickers come back home to put down roots and raise families. It's already happening because they know the transformation has begun.

The time is now to build this future together, here in New Brunswick.