

# 2011 Speech from the Throne

Mr. Speaker, honourable members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and fellow New Brunswickers.

Welcome to the opening of the Second Session of the 57th Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick.

The autumn is a time of change, as we say goodbye to the warmth of summer and prepare for the snow and splendour that is a New Brunswick winter.

This throne speech marks the beginning of the legislative year and the continuation of your government's work to support a stronger economy and enhanced quality of life while living within our means.

As we begin this session, we congratulate former MLA and leader of the opposition Bernard Valcourt on his election as Member of Parliament for Madawaska-Restigouche and former MLAs and cabinet ministers Keith Ashfield and Rodney Weston on their re-election as the MPs for Fredericton and Saint John. We also congratulate Mr. Valcourt and Mr. Ashfield on being named to the federal cabinet.

## Celebrations

Last month, 10 more distinguished New Brunswickers were inducted into the Order of New Brunswick. The inductees recognized this year are: Lord Beaverbrook, Marjorie Cockburn, Patrick Darrah, Robert Frenette, S. Paul Handa, Jacques LaForge, Gilmond Larocque, Léo-Paul Pinet, Jessica Ryan, and Donald Savoie.

Six accomplished New Brunswickers were invested into the Order of Canada. Former lieutenant-governor Herménégilde Chiasson was made an officer of the order and Marc Chouinard, John McLaughlin, Shirley Bear, Larry Nelson, and former senator Erminie Cohen were made members.

A number of soldiers from New Brunswick received decorations for valour and meritorious service from Governor General David Johnston over the past year. Pvt. Tony Rodney Vance Harris received the Medal of Military Valour and Chief Warrant Officer Ernest Gérard Joseph Poitras and Maj. Russell Neal Washburn received the Meritorious Service Medal.

In addition, Brig. Gen. James Baxter Simms was made an Officer of the Order of Military Merit and Captains Paul Henry Hartinger, John Douglas Hill and William English Moore; Chief Warrant Officers Jean-Paul Savoie, Anthony Slack and Gary Bradley Biggar; Master Warrant Officers Donald Tupper and Robert Paul Bartlett; Warrant Officer Patrick Love; and Sgt. Thomas William Hale were made Members.

We welcome Col. Paul Rutherford as the new commander of 3 Area Support Group Base Gagetown and Col. Dave Corbould as the new commander of the Combat Training Centre.

Three New Brunswick peace officers were inducted into the Order of Merit of the Police Forces in 2011: Staff Sgt. Jean-Marc Collin, Moncton RCMP; Chief Stephen McIntyre, Rothesay Regional Police Force; and Staff Sgt. Stephen Patterson, Saint John Police Force.

As well, five New Brunswickers were honoured by the Governor General with the medal of bravery for their courage and heroism this year: Steve Degrace of Beresford; Monique Gagnon of Petit Rocher; André Maillet and Robert Maillet of St. Thomas de Kent; and Krista Dorothy Girvan of Edmonton and Riverview.

Nancy Hartling of Riverview, a passionate advocate for women, focussing on domestic violence and poverty, also received the Governor General's Award in commemoration of the Persons Case.

Congratulations to the New Brunswick athletes and para-athletes that competed for Team Canada at major international events in 2011: Jay Johnson of Saint John – Baseball; Eric Feunekes and Shawn Daye-Finely of Fredericton – Wrestling; and Jacob Kilpatrick of Saint John – Indoor Volleyball competed at the 2011 Pan American Games last month.

At this month's 2011 Parapan American Games, Shane Dobson of Campbellton competed in Athletics and Dave Durepos of Charters Settlement in Wheelchair Basketball. Mr. Durepos also had the honour of being flag bearer for Team Canada at the games' opening ceremony.

As well, Jeff Sinclair of Charters Settlement and Chauncey O'Toole of Belleisle competed for Canada at the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand.

Team New Brunswick won 16 medals, including two gold, five silver and nine bronze, at the 2011 Canada Winter Games in Halifax. We congratulate all our young athletes who represented our province at this national event.

New Brunswick was proud to host the Assembly of First Nations Annual General Meeting in Moncton this past July. Over 600 First Nations communities from across Canada were represented with over 2,000 participants taking part.

We honour Herzl Kashetsky of Saint John, who received the 2011 Strathbutler Award for excellence in the visual arts and Herménégilde Chiasson, who received the Canada Council for the Arts Molson Prize in the arts, the first Acadian to receive this prestigious honour.

As well, I recently had the pleasure of presenting the Lieutenant-Governor's Awards to France Daigle of Moncton for High Achievement in French Language Literary Arts; Yvon Tilmon Gallant of Moncton for High Achievement in the Visual Arts and Patrick Clark of Fredericton for High Achievement in the Performing Arts (theatre).

Finally, we congratulate the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra on its history-making first place performance in the Summa Cum Laude International Youth Music Festival in Vienna this past July. Their incredible achievement is all the greater because it marks the first time a Canadian orchestra has risen above all competition at this prestigious festival. Each of these 68 young musicians can be proud of their accomplishment, their musical ability and their representation of our province and our country on the world stage.

Over the past few years, the Bay of Fundy has been part of a global campaign to recognize it as one of the top Wonders of Nature. We thank all those who voted and congratulate all those who worked hard to promote the Bay of Fundy.

## **Condolences**

We pause to remember Lawrence Garvie, former speaker, cabinet minister and MLA for Fredericton; Azor LeBlanc, who served the people of Shediac in this Chamber for many years; and former MLA, lifelong community leader and mayor of Saint John Eric Teed.

We also take a moment to remember federal Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the New Democratic Party Jack Layton, who passed away this summer, as well as retired chief justice of New Brunswick and former provincial conflict of interest commissioner Stuart Stratton.

New Brunswick lost a number of community and business leaders this year. Wallace McCain passed away in May and Richard Oland in July. Long-time St. Martins mayor Jim Huttges passed away in August. Moncton's well-known and regarded general manager of economic development, culture and tourism, Ian Fowler and former world junior curling champion Jim Sullivan, passed away earlier this month. These leaders made significant contributions to their communities and to our province and we honour their legacy and their accomplishments.

## **A New Foundation**

The last few years have seen significant and difficult changes which have impacted the people of New Brunswick. It is no longer business as usual. Our economy is adjusting to international forces, our population is shifting, and our expectations are increasing with new standards and technology. As a province, we are learning to live within this new reality which can sometimes bring disappointments as well as opportunity.

Over the next twelve months, your government will continue to lay a new foundation for New Brunswick. This will be achieved with an economic development strategy that will move our workers from "hope wanted" to "help wanted" with investments in job opportunities. Families will be supported with renewed programs and services which will provide new tools to help us overcome poverty together, increase access to primary health care and provide quality education for the next generation. And, finally, this new foundation will be supported by a government that is innovative, equitable and sustainable, following the largest public-sector engagement exercise in the history of New Brunswick.

## **Investing in Jobs**

While supporting families and getting government's house in order are critical to building this new foundation, they will not in themselves ensure economic growth. Ultimately, New Brunswick needs a robust economy to create the quality jobs, employment income and revenues required to deliver public services. It needs a pro-active, made-in-New Brunswick economic strategy that will invest in high-growth opportunities and ensure our labour force has the skills to match industry's needs so we can have more people working.

The Department of Business New Brunswick will identify opportunities for growth and develop **focused strategies for investment in sectors**. These strategies will complement existing strategies in traditional sectors of the economy as well as charting a course for developing emerging, knowledge-based opportunities.

This is not to suggest that projects in other sectors will be excluded from consideration, but rather, the focus will be on the potential for growth. This potential will be measured in terms of above-average paying job opportunities, higher-than-average investment in research and development, higher-than-average productivity, and higher-than-average value-added export potential.

Innovation will be an important part of rebuilding New Brunswick's economy. As more of our companies compete globally, we need to foster innovation and create more opportunities to grow the economy. That is why your government has created a **working group on innovation**, including academic and private sector leaders, to bring forward recommendations on improving our efforts on innovation, research and development.

Some activities, such as the establishment of an **Atlantic Venture Capital Fund** to improve access to capital for emerging, high-growth knowledge industries, are well underway. Other action items will be implemented once details are finalized over the coming months and the provincial economic development framework and delivery model is unveiled.

As part of your government's re-energized and refocused approach to economic development, **Invest New Brunswick** was officially launched on September 20.

Your government has also been working hard to fulfill commitments for Northern New Brunswick, creating two new **economic development and innovation funds** totalling \$250 million for Northern New Brunswick and the Miramichi region. These funds will focus on five priority areas: growth and development capital; adoption of information and communication technology; research, development and innovation; improving strategic infrastructure; and advanced workforce development.

Your government has consulted with stakeholders on changes to the *Public Purchasing Act* that are required to modernize the legislation, keep pace with changes to trade agreements and give New Brunswick-based business increased opportunities to bid on provincial government contracts. Due to the scope and magnitude of the changes required to current legislation, a new Act, the **Procurement Act**, will be introduced. This Act will enhance competitive opportunities for New Brunswick companies and ensure maximum value for public funds is realized.

Moving goods and people safely and efficiently to and from their destinations is a key element in fostering a strong and vibrant economy. Because of this, your government will continue to invest in **strategic transportation infrastructure**. As members will see in the three-year Capital Budget to be tabled during this session, your government will continue work to complete a number of major highway improvement projects that will provide safe and efficient transportation throughout the province.

Working in partnership with the federal government, the other Atlantic provinces and private-sector stakeholders, your government will continue to promote the strategic benefits the **Atlantic Gateway and Trade Corridor** can offer to international business and trading partners. New investment will ensure New Brunswick is poised to grow international air cargo and cruise passenger opportunities.

In connection with, among other things, the objective of attracting out-of-province investments through trade missions and increasing the number of immigrants to New Brunswick, your government will make structured, targeted efforts to build on our international operations and networks for the benefit of our province.

Persons with disabilities are ready, willing and able to help New Brunswick overcome its labour force challenges. Your government has recently formed a committee composed of non-profit agencies, employers and government whose mandate will be to develop an **Employment Action Plan for Persons with a Disability** with the goal of increasing the number of persons with disabilities in the labour market.

Your government is committed to investing in our greatest resource: our people. This year, your government will be moving forward with its platform commitment to ensure predictable, multi-year funding for universities and predictable tuition for students. As well, work is underway to ensure government and universities can report to the public on the outcomes of public investments in universities, including graduation and employment outcomes.

Your government remains committed to modernize our **provincial parks**. Planning has already commenced for an on-line reservation system which will make it easier for visitors to experience our provincial parks.

In the past year, your government has worked with federal partners to support restructuring of the lobster fishing fleet and the shrimp fleet by reducing the number of licences to provide greater economic sustainability in the industry. Efforts towards **fleet rationalization** will continue in 2011-12 by finalizing purchase agreements in the ground fish fleet.

Research and development efforts are helping to explore new and emerging markets to support **species diversification**. In partnership with the salmon aquaculture industry and federal partners, your government will continue to invest in the development of an **integrated pest management framework** and research on alternative products for the management and control of sea lice.

Your government will support development of **new crop opportunities** for New Brunswick farmers. These opportunities will be developed through targeted assistance associated with land development, risk reduction and productivity enhancement.

Your government recognizes that 2011 has presented serious challenges for many farmers in New Brunswick due to the unfavorable weather conditions that prevailed throughout the growing season. Your government will continue to work with agricultural producers and the Government of Canada to help affected farmers recover from the severe losses they experienced.

Over the coming year, government will work with partners to develop the **Growing Forward 2 Multilateral Framework Agreement** based on the principles agreed to in the *St. Andrews Statement* held here in New Brunswick in July 2011. Growing Forward 2 will be an important component to help agriculture meet the challenges and opportunities of 2020 and beyond.

Your government is committed to improving delivery of **farm fuel tax exemptions and rebates**. Discussions with the farming industry have resulted in a significant improvement in the delivery of this program.

Your government has been working with industry to design a **digital media incentive** to help encourage economic growth and job creation in this important sector of the new economy. Details of this new program will be announced as part of the 2012-13 Budget.

Last month, your government released a 10-year **Energy Blueprint** with an important vision – protecting New Brunswick families and industry by lowering costs, creating efficiencies and making the right choices to keep rates competitive and stable, while meeting our responsibilities to the environment in a balanced and incremental manner. This vision will drive decision-making in the energy sector.

One of the earliest and key actions of the blueprint will amalgamate the NB Power group of companies into a single vertically integrated Crown utility. This amalgamation will include the dissolution of the NBSO and migration of system operator functions back to NB Power. Work will be conducted over the next year to develop the necessary changes to the **Electricity Act** for the consideration of this Assembly.

Your government will bring qualifying large industrial companies' electricity costs in line with their Canadian competitors by implementing a **Large Industrial Renewable Energy Purchase Program** by bringing forward the necessary amendments to the *Electricity Act* during this session of the Legislative Assembly. This initiative by your government will ensure competitiveness and rate predictability for many of New Brunswick's largest employers, while at the same time protecting thousands of jobs.

Your government will support small-scale renewable energy projects, integrate current and future wind generation in the most cost-effective and efficient manner, and support promising solar, bio-energy and other emerging renewable energy technologies. Also, the Department of Energy will develop and implement policies to optimize the energy output from our province's wood-based biomass resources.

Your government will require minimum energy efficiency standards for new building construction in New Brunswick by adopting national standards and will amend the **New Brunswick Building Code Act** to create the authority to do so.

Over the next year, your government will perform a comprehensive review of the **Petroleum Products Pricing Act and Regulations** to ensure it continues to foster price stability while ensuring the lowest possible price to the consumer without jeopardizing continuity of supply.

Your government has already begun restructuring the Energy and Utilities Board to consist of full-time members. Also, your government will appoint a full-time public energy advocate to replace the system of ad-hoc appointments of public interveners. Legislative amendments to the **Energy Utilities Board Act** will be developed over the next year.

Your government will review the natural gas rate structure and distribution network to achieve a more equitable rate structure. With natural gas prices at historic lows, it is unacceptable that New Brunswickers are faced with the highest natural gas distribution rates in North America.

Your government will also work to improve access to natural gas throughout the province to help our companies reduce their energy costs. Amendments to the **Gas Distribution Act** will be brought forward as required to meet these objectives.

The oil and natural gas industry is not new to New Brunswick. The oil and natural gas industry has been contributing to our provincial economy for many decades and that continues to this day, with 30 natural gas wells producing in the Sussex area and 16 oil wells in the Elgin area.

As we look to 2012 and beyond, your government anticipates continued oil and natural gas activity and exploration in our province and will continue to provide strong leadership on this file.

As it continues to explore New Brunswick's potential in further developing the oil and gas sector, your government has maintained a strong and parallel focus on the protective measures necessary to ensure responsible development.

Your government is developing a comprehensive action plan to ensure that New Brunswick has a **strong regulatory regime** in place that includes robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. This regulatory structure will also ensure that the economic benefits of oil and gas exploration and development are maximized for all New Brunswickers.

Your government recognizes there are technologies being used to develop this resource about which New Brunswickers are seeking more information. We will continue to ensure New Brunswickers have all the information they need to make an informed decision on this opportunity.

To meet this need, a multi-disciplinary team of experts from across government have worked collaboratively over a number of months to identify areas requiring either new or more specific measures to protect human health, drinking water and societal interests.

The work of this group will result in an **Environmental Protection Plan** identifying immediate, intermediate and longer-term actions to ensure New Brunswick is positioned to protect citizens and their property as well as the vital aspects of our shared environment.

Government will prioritize and adopt these actions incrementally so as to anticipate next stages in development of the oil and gas sector, and will move quickly to adopt the first phase of measures in the spring of 2012.

The forest industry continues to be a cornerstone of the New Brunswick economy. In the coming months, your government will announce its **2012 Forest Management Strategy** taking into consideration the recommendations of both the Private and Crown Land Task Forces.

Your government will reaffirm its commitment to the Canadian military and armed forces reservists in New Brunswick by enhancing existing **leave for reservists' rules** under the *Employment Standards Act*. In addition to extending job protection during a leave of absence to all classes of reservists, your government will introduce specific provisions in legislation to facilitate unpaid leaves of absence for reservists' annual training.

Your government will introduce amendments to the **Securities Act**. These amendments include harmonized and enhanced provisions to permit the recognition of credit rating organizations, the recognition of auditor oversight bodies and the ability to adopt the use of International Financial Reporting Standards.

Over the years, government has responded to public concerns by developing a robust regulatory regime to protect our province and its residents and to guide development of our economy and resources. In the coming months, a **Smart Regulation System** will be developed to guide development of New Brunswick regulations.

## **Healthy Families and an Enhanced Quality of Life**

To support the development of the next Provincial Health Plan and the health minister's reform of the health care system, your government has started a **Premier's Dialogue with Citizens on the Sustainability of the Health Care System**. This public consultation will inform New Brunswickers and engage them in the challenges and opportunities for renewal of our health care system.

Your government recognizes that primary health care is the cornerstone of a strong health care system. Recently, a **Primary Health Care Summit** was held to produce a shared vision for improving primary health care services in New Brunswick. The response to the summit has been overwhelmingly positive and the ideas generated will inform a **strategic action plan**. Your government will receive recommendations in 2012 from the Primary Health Care Steering Committee that will contribute to the development of this plan.

The current **Provincial Health Plan** expires at the end of 2012 and your government has already begun to lay the groundwork for the next plan. Consultations will be conducted not just with health care partners and stakeholders, but with all New Brunswickers on the future of our health care system.

Your government remains focused in its continued support for early learning and child care despite the difficult economic challenges. Based on extensive consultation with stakeholders, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will address necessary changes to the un-proclaimed **Early Learning and Child Care Act** to further advance New Brunswick as a leader in early childhood development.

As part of your government's commitment in *Putting New Brunswick First*, a task force has been created to review the decision to change the entry point of **Early French Immersion**. A comprehensive consultation process with parents, teachers and interested organizations is occurring throughout the province. Following this consultation, the four-member task force will make recommendations to government in early 2012.

In addition, your government will continue to work closely with le Groupe d'action sur l'école francophone on the recommendations of the **Gino LeBlanc Commission**.

Following consultations with various stakeholders and extensive site visits in schools, your government will announce a plan to address **inclusion in our school system**. This plan will help refocus government's efforts to ensure a consistent approach in inclusion practices throughout the province and that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

A citizen-led engagement initiative on learning and innovation, called *Learning: Everybody's Project*, was launched last year with the goal of making New Brunswick 'The Learning Province' of Canada. A second phase of consultation, consisting of a series of **public dialogue sessions**, will begin in January 2012.

Your government remains committed to working with New Brunswickers to **overcome poverty together**. While government must address its serious fiscal situation, it will not do so at the expense of those living in poverty. Your government will implement a new **vision and dental program for children in low income families** in the next year.

In addition, a **prescription drug program for non-insured New Brunswickers** is being developed. Consultation sessions will be announced for the coming months that will include key stakeholder organizations, business groups and relevant professional bodies such as pharmacists, nurses and doctors.

As well, the Department of Social Development is consulting the social assistance advisory committee of the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation as it **redesigns social assistance programs** to better provide for the transition to work.

In the next decade, New Brunswick will face unique and serious challenges related to a sharp increase in the senior population and the socio-economic implications of such a demographic shift. Given the number of seniors is increasing steadily, meeting their needs and expectations will be increasingly challenging without careful planning and thoughtful foresight.

A Panel on Seniors: Living Healthy, Aging Well will be created as a targeted advisory body to the Premier. The panel will consider the challenges, as well as opportunities, that will arise over the next 10 years and provide advice to government on the development of a progressive ***Living Healthy, Aging Well Blueprint for Seniors in New Brunswick***.

New Brunswick is one of three provinces that do not have a mandatory barrier-free building code regulation that exceeds the minimum standards of the National Building Code. Legislation will be introduced to amend the ***New Brunswick Building Code Act*** which will improve accessibility for New Brunswickers with disabilities.

With regard to official languages, your government remains committed to official bilingualism and the development of the two official language communities of New Brunswick, as well as to the principles and objectives of the ***Official Languages Act***.

Last May, we proposed and passed legislation to appoint a nonpartisan select committee that will, in the coming year, be responsible for reviewing the Act and holding consultations. Your government will support the work of the ***Select Committee on the Revision of the Official Languages Act*** in order to provide an opportunity for all New Brunswickers to express their views and provide input on amendments to this Act.

Over the past year, your government has governed openly by engaging citizens in a number of decision-making processes. To-date, 20 **citizen engagement initiatives** have either been undertaken or are currently underway.

As part of the overall Government Renewal process, your government asked the New Brunswick **Task Force on Protecting Pensions** to review both private and public sector pension plans to ensure they are affordable, sustainable and have secure benefits. Their recommendations will help shape appropriate rules and regulations to protect employees, employers and pensions in the private sector and will be taken into consideration as your government moves toward sustainable pensions for public employees.

Your government endorsed the **Sport Plan for New Brunswick** and the four pillars that focus on enhanced participation, excellence, capacity and interaction. Several initiatives have begun including additional financial support to help children from lower-income families to participate in sport and recreation.

Your government will introduce a new **Species at Risk Act** to replace the outdated *Endangered Species Act*. The new, modern Act will complement similar federal, provincial and territorial legislation in a national effort to prevent the loss of plants and animals due to human activities.

Extreme weather events create personal loss and economic burden for individuals and government. To better position property owners, communities, and the province to address these risks, a series of measures will be developed collaboratively to assess and communicate better the risks of the effects of climate change under a **2012-20 Climate Action Plan**. This plan will include specific actions to flag flooding and storm surge risks.

Government received a clear message from those who are interested in New Brunswick's wetlands that there is a need to develop programs which safeguard our natural environment in support of sustainable development over the long-term. Considering the input received following citizen and stakeholder engagement processes, your government will implement a **wetlands management strategy** encompassing such longer-term actions.

## **Government Renewal**

Over the course of the last few months, the largest-ever engagement of public servants has been underway, working towards the goal of ensuring the Government of New Brunswick is able to provide appropriate and affordable services to citizens on a sustainable basis. Each and every part of government, from departments and Crown corporations to the Legislative Assembly itself, has been analyzed and rethought with a view to prioritize, optimize and improve service delivery for the people of New Brunswick. This exercise has been known as **Government Renewal**.

A major component of Government Renewal is to ensure departments and agencies have a clear vision of overall government direction, goals and targets. To facilitate this and to ensure effective alignment of department service delivery, your government is embarking on a major exercise in developing a **balanced scorecard**. This initiative will provide government with a powerful tool to focus public sector efforts toward achieving key performance outcomes.

As your government continues to work towards balanced budgets, it will continue to engage stakeholders to ensure there is an alignment between affordable quality public services and public expectations. And, by improving the **culture of government** to focus on core services, accountability through performance measures and continuous performance improvement, a foundation for continuing discipline and responsible government is being established.

To address the concerns raised by the Auditor General, your government will examine the feasibility of creating a single, independent **Financial Services Regulatory Agency** in order to bring consistent application of regulatory authority, reduced duplication and to provide for an independent hearing tribunal.

The Legal Aid System is critical to ensure access to justice for those who can least afford it. Your government will initiate a **structural review of Legal Aid** with the goal of providing greater efficiency as well as greater accessibility.

Your government will continue to work with the federal government to ensure that **fiscal transfers** continue to support the essential services New Brunswickers need. Your government will also continue to work with its regional partners in Atlantic Canada to find opportunities to improve public services to citizens while lessening duplication and reducing costs to taxpayers.

To improve efficiency and increase industry competitiveness your government, in collaboration with the Province of Nova Scotia and the federal government, will work on harmonizing and streamlining processes in support of the **trucking industry**.

Following consultation, review and analysis, the **New Brunswick Liquor Corporation** will introduce a comprehensive report on its mandate and future. The Premier tasked the board of directors and management to review ways to strengthen retail strategies and find new ones, increase revenues, and improve the culture and governance of the organization. The review is nearly complete and your government will begin implementing approved recommendations in early 2012.

Your government is committed to completing a renewal of the 2002 **Provincial Cultural Policy**. The cultural sector is important to our quality of life and there is a cultural dividend from public investment in the arts and heritage. It has been ten years since our cultural policy was last reviewed and as part of this renewal, all New Brunswickers, including those working in the cultural sector, are invited to contribute to this renewal by participating in planned consultations.

Individual meetings with **New Brunswick First Nations** chiefs have been held over the past year. Meetings were held to hear directly the concerns of New Brunswick's First Nation leadership and these meetings will continue in the coming year.

Your government was proud to conclude an agreement with New Brunswick First Nations and the federal government to establish a process to develop a Framework Agreement on Aboriginal and treaty rights and self-government.

New Brunswick has a shared responsibility for ensuring health, educational and child welfare outcomes for all New Brunswickers. For Aboriginal children, many of these services are delivered by First Nations through funding partnerships including the provincial and federal governments. Your government firmly believes a child's needs should come before cost or jurisdiction and will **implement Jordan's Principle** on providing public services for Aboriginal children during this session.

The **Healing-to-Wellness Court** pilot project will be located on the Elsipogtog First Nation and will be the first of its kind in New Brunswick. This partnership will incorporate First Nations practices and culture, and will deal not only with crime but also underlying causes.

In addition, your government will bring forward a **Duty to Consult Policy** to guide departments through the constitutional duty to consult with our province's 15 First Nation communities.

Members of this Assembly will consider changes to the ***Electoral Boundaries and Representation Act*** that will make it more timely and responsive to New Brunswick's fixed elections schedule. It will ensure provincial ridings are as representative and equitable as possible for all electors.

Furthermore, in these times of spending restraint and operational review, the members of this House should not be considered exempt. In the last session, members voted to reduce the cost of MLA pensions. In this session, members will consider the question of representation in the Legislature. The number of **electoral districts** in our province will be reduced as part of the above amendments.

Your government believes New Brunswickers should have a say in who represents them in the Senate of Canada. Your government will introduce legislation to enable citizens to vote on New Brunswick nominees for the Senate. By **selecting our Senator nominees**, the Upper House of the Canadian Parliament will gain further legitimacy and, as a result, become more effective. It will help ensure decisions of the federal Parliament are balanced to protect the interest of all Canadians, no matter where they live.

Your government will soon receive a report from former Ombudsman Bernard Richard concerning the various **legislative officers of this Assembly**, including recommendations for making these offices more effective. These recommendations will be considered in consultation with all parties and subsequent amendments to relevant legislation and operating procedures will be introduced in the coming months.

In addition, members of this Assembly will review and consider new legislation governing the **Office of the Auditor General** to render this service more modern and effective.

Your government is serious about fiscal responsibility and reducing the deficit. A **multi-year capital budget plan** will be tabled this fall that will reflect the ongoing funding required for projects already underway, along with the funding necessary to maintain existing infrastructure.

Your government will consider options for the development of a new strategic direction for New Brunswick's gaming regime to help guide the development of **responsible gaming policy** for the next three to five years. Strategic objectives will focus on collaboration, future opportunities, transparency and accountability.

Our society has changed significantly in the past 45 years, but the governance system which supports citizens at the local level remains mostly unchanged. As New Brunswickers, we value the heritage and tradition evident in our communities, but we also know they cannot be sustained into the future without a new approach to governance and service delivery.

During the first six months of this year, your government undertook an extensive consultation process, actively seeking the views of citizens and stakeholders on property assessment and taxation, community funding arrangements and a regional approach to service delivery.

New Brunswickers responded with a broad range of perspectives on these and many other aspects of local governance, showing how complex and how interconnected these issues are.

Throughout this consultation process, New Brunswickers signalled their strong support for change to the local governance system and your government will take action.

Your government will bring forward a **Local Governance Action Plan** that will strengthen the capacity of local government structures while maintaining community identity; bring fairness and transparency to property taxation and assessments; create a new model for community-governed regional service delivery; build a more equitable community funding mechanism; and modernize legislation to better support local and regional decision-making.

Together, these initiatives support the goal of making New Brunswick's communities and regions sustainable in the long term. This action plan will be implemented in phases over the next two years.

## **Conclusion**

Over the course of this session, ministers will provide more details regarding the initiatives and legislation contained in this Speech from the Throne. Your government will also provide details on other programs and policies of importance to all New Brunswickers.

Earlier this year, your government began its first steps towards changing the culture of government. To achieve this goal together, the people of New Brunswick have been engaged in historic levels of consultations under the banner of Government Renewal.

The results of these efforts will include a legislative and budgetary agenda to be considered by this Assembly that will lay a new foundation for rebuilding New Brunswick.

To be sustainable however, this new foundation must be built upon the bedrock of trust and collaboration. Only then can our province get back on the road to prosperity while addressing New Brunswickers' priorities, including investing in jobs; supporting healthy families and an enhanced quality of life; and continuous Government Renewal.

May divine Providence continue to bless New Brunswick and its residents, and guide this Assembly in its deliberations.