

# SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

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

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The Honourable  
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Lieutenant-Governor

# Speech from the Throne 2007

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests and all New Brunswickers. Welcome to the opening of the First Session of the 56th Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick.

On behalf of this Assembly, I welcome the Honourable Shawn Graham to his first Session as Premier of New Brunswick. I also welcome the newly-elected Members of the Legislative Assembly and extend best wishes to all those taking on new roles in this session. I also offer best wishes and thanks to those former members not returning to the Legislature.

I also want to take this opportunity to extend thanks and appreciation to former Premier Bernard Lord for his years of dedicated service to his province. Mr. Lord has served the people of Moncton East and this province faithfully for the past eight years. We offer him and his family our most sincere good wishes as they embark on this new chapter in their lives.

Our Assembly looks forward to welcoming the next representative that will be chosen by the people of Moncton East.



New Brunswick is the great province it is because of the contributions made by New Brunswickers. On November 24, 2006, nine new members were inducted into the Order of New Brunswick. They are Richard Gorham of Kingston Peninsula; Joyce Hudson of Hopewell Hill; Audrey Ingalls of Grand Manan; Martin J. Légère of Caraquet; John W. Meagher of Hanwell; Arthur Motyer of Sackville; Robert Pichette of Moncton; Benedict Pothier of Campbellton; and Jean-Claude Savoie of Saint-Quentin.

In 2006, three New Brunswickers became Members of the Order of Canada. They are Susan Butler, Norman Whitney and Aldéa Landry.

Peter Powning was awarded the 2006 Saidye Bronfman Award, the pre-eminent distinction in craft in Canada.

Marie-Jo Thériot brought home the Félix award for contemporary folk album of the year for *Les Matins Habitables* while Annie Blanchard was awarded the Félix for song of the year for "Évangéline."

At the Commonwealth Games in Sydney, Monique Allain was part of Canada's mission staff while Fredericton native Sarah Forbes competed in field hockey.

We also take this opportunity to recognize the many athletes, coaches and officials who will be representing New Brunswick at the Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse, Yukon later this month. We wish them the best of luck.



Each time this Legislature convenes, we remember those former members who have passed away since we last met. Today we remember Bruce Smith, who entered provincial politics in 1987 as the member for Carleton South, becoming Minister of Supply and Services. He was re-elected in September 1991 and served as Solicitor General until April 1994.

In September 1995, Mr. Smith was re-elected as the member for the newly established constituency of Woodstock, and served as Minister of Supply and Services until he stepped down in July 1997. He continued to serve the people of Woodstock until his retirement from politics in 1999.



Canada continues to take an active role in bringing order and hope to centres of conflict around the world. This contribution often comes at a high price. We remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the interest of bringing peace to those caught in the grip of war: Bathurst-native Chief Warrant Officer Robert Girouard, Regimental Sergeant Major of the First Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group, who was serving in Afghanistan and Sgt. Michael Todd Seeley of Fredericton who was serving with the U.S. 28th Infantry Unit in Iraq.

We also offer our thoughts and best wishes for a successful mission and safe return to the soldiers of the Second Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment (2RCR) Battle Group from Canadian Forces Base Gagetown who have departed or are preparing to depart for their mission in Afghanistan.

Since this Legislature last met, our province also lost a number of distinguished residents. These include former Chief Justice of New Brunswick Charles Hughes, Canadian boxing legend Yvon Durelle, noted philanthropist and businessman Mitchell Franklin, former president of l'Université de Moncton and champion of bilingualism Jean Cadieux, and former Fredericton city councillor, provincial and municipal trail system pioneer and rugby advocate Bill Thorpe.



As we embark today on a new legislative session, let us remember the duties and responsibilities placed upon us. Over the course of the coming months, this Assembly will undertake deliberations and debate on issues of immediate and intimate importance to the people of New Brunswick. Debate will be vigorous, opinions will differ and passions will run high. Throughout this work, let us all be vigilant of our obligation to conduct ourselves in a manner befitting the tradition of this House.



There are many examples of how New Brunswick set the course for a better province and a better Canada. New Brunswick formed the first Department of Health, implemented one of the most significant transformations of local governance through Equal Opportunity and remains the only officially bilingual province in Canada. Our province was the first to seize the opportunity of the information economy. Your government is committed to restoring New Brunswick's place as a national leader.

From August 8 to 10, New Brunswick will host the 2007 annual summer meeting of the Council of the Federation at which time the Premier will assume the Chair of the Council. Our Premier looks forward to working with his provincial and territorial colleagues to strengthen the Canadian federation during his one-year term as chair.



For New Brunswick to become self-sufficient in the future, it needs a fair and principled Equalization program today. Your government will continue to advocate for a program that uses a ten-province standard and 100 per cent revenue coverage, including resource revenues.

Your government will also promote partnerships with the federal government in programs such as post-secondary education and transfers in support of infrastructure.

Your government is committed to building partnerships with other provinces. That's why New Brunswick recently led the Atlantic Canada mission to Alberta. This mission demonstrated how New Brunswick can put our manufacturing experience to work for business in Alberta.



Your government will continue to work closely with Acadian organizations and stakeholders to further the development of Francophone and Acadian residents of this province. Your government has created a deputy minister position under the Department of Health in order to meet the needs of Francophones and Acadians and to put mechanisms in place for ongoing collaboration. Your government will continue to work with organizers of the 2009 Congrès mondial acadien to ensure the success of this world-class event and to maximize spin-offs for the Acadian Peninsula and New Brunswick. Your government will continue to promote our distinctiveness and dynamism as the only officially bilingual province, both within Canada and internationally.



Your government also recognizes the importance of living within our means. New Brunswickers are prudent and responsible each and every day and expect that prudence from their elected officials. Your government is committed to balanced budgets, fiscal responsibility and transparency. Your government will live in accordance with the *Fiscal Responsibility and Balanced Budget Act*. To that end, your government will table its first budget on March 13, 2007.



On October 3, 2006, your new government took office with a commitment to approach each day with a strong sense of purpose. This commitment was demonstrated by the initiatives announced on Day One of their mandate. Your government reduced the provincial tax on gasoline by 3.8 cents per litre. Grants were created for first-year university students and parental and spousal contribution requirements for student loans were eliminated. Seniors' homes, assets and life savings were removed from the calculation of nursing home fees. And your government delivered a memorandum of understanding to the Mayor of Saint John on harbour clean-up.

Legislation supporting these initiatives will be introduced during this session.



Your government is driven by the goal of making New Brunswick self-sufficient over the next 20 years. This means increasing New Brunswick's population, economic output, productivity and income levels. With a larger pool of self-generated revenue, your government will have greater flexibility to fund public services and infrastructure. A stronger, sustainable economy will reduce the province's dependence on equalization.

In order to achieve this goal, your government has established the Task-Force on Self-Sufficiency which, following consultations with New Brunswickers, will present its report in April. Your government will provide a response to this report in the upcoming session of the Legislative Assembly.

These actions will mark the next steps on the road to self-sufficiency. They will chart the course for the kind of transformational change that has not been witnessed in New Brunswick in more than a generation.

Before embarking on any significant journey, there are preparations which must be undertaken. It is this preparatory work that will be the focus of this legislative session.



Your government earned the trust of New Brunswickers by outlining the *Charter for Change* which will form the basis for many of the initiatives that will be introduced in the coming months. The cornerstones of the *Charter for Change* are the Three Es – education, energy and economic development.

Your government will work with New Brunswick's teachers, District Education Councils and academic institutions to build the best education system in Canada. This year, your government will release a new Plan for Education. The Minister of Education has been consulting with teachers, District Education Councils, parents and students on this action plan of new ideas and programs to begin transforming our schools.

This year, your government will begin its commitment to implement the MacKay Report recommendations for improving our inclusive education system and meeting the diverse needs of all our students. The Minister of Education will appear before the Standing Committee on Education in order to initiate the discussion on how to ensure that each child in New Brunswick has the chance to reach his or her full potential.

Your government will further demonstrate its commitment to inclusive education by ensuring that new hope is given to children with autism. A plan will be announced this session to increase the number of trained autism support workers in the system.

Your government understands the importance of a school to the community around it. Your government will move forward on a new community schools policy that will enhance the quality of education in rural and urban communities alike by transforming schools into true centres of learning for the whole community.

Truly innovative change will be driven by teachers and your government will announce new measures to support our best teachers and principals in being leaders in innovative education.

During the upcoming session, your government will unveil a new accountability agenda for improving results for early literacy and exceptional learners.

The Departments of Education and Family and Community Services will work jointly and in partnership with stakeholders to develop a long-term plan for child care and early learning.



In creating a self-sufficient province, access to quality post-secondary education and training is critically important. Your government will work with our educational institutions to ensure that New Brunswickers are getting the skills and education they need to meet their full potential.

Last month, your government launched the Post-Secondary Education Commission to examine accessibility as well as relevance, quality, competitiveness and collaboration within New Brunswick's post-secondary education sector.

This commission will focus on New Brunswickers of all ages, whether they are planning to enrol on a part-time or a full-time basis and wherever they live in the province. It will examine the entire post-secondary education and training sector, including public and private universities, the New Brunswick Community College network, apprenticeship, private training and other aspects of literacy and lifelong learning.

Many believe that high tuition is discouraging some young New Brunswickers from pursuing university study. Currently, New Brunswick university graduates have the second-highest student debt load in the country.

In addition to the commitments undertaken on the first day of their mandate, your government will also introduce a new *Post-Secondary Student Financial Assistance Act* to accommodate the evolution of student financial assistance in New Brunswick and Canada.

Improving literacy rates in New Brunswick will be important in order to achieve self-sufficiency. A Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly will be established to engage New Brunswickers in a discussion on the literacy challenges we face and how we can collectively address them over the long-term.

To improve opportunities and services for adults, your government will be integrating our community-based adult learning programs. Your government will also enhance the public library system and establish targets for strengthening public library service as outlined in the *Charter for Change*.



Your government will support New Brunswick's transformation as a North American leader in energy conservation and generation. These two goals do not have to be mutually exclusive. Your government has already demonstrated a commitment to green energy, an example of which is the announcement of a 75-megawatt wind power project for Albert County. Your government will continue to seek partners to further explore the potential of tidal power from our coastal waters.

With a focus on renewable and alternative energy sources, your government will work closely with Ottawa to ensure New Brunswick can capitalize on recently-announced federal programs on efficiency, research and development and new technologies in the energy sector.

Your government has followed through on the commitment to establish a \$2,000 home-efficiency grant. Through Efficiency NB, your government went even further by introducing a more comprehensive plan that makes New Brunswick the leader in all of Canada in home energy efficiency programs.

In the months ahead, your government will examine how to best assist the commercial and industrial sectors to become more energy efficient.

There are two other commitments that your government has fulfilled, and they include making improvements to the gasoline regulation model and implementing a no-disconnect policy to make sure that no one in the province with legitimate economic needs will have the power turned off during the cold winter months.

In addition, your government will follow through on the commitment to study the feasibility of a second nuclear reactor at Point Lepreau as well as examine the potential of sending natural gas to the northern area of our province.

Your government will explore potential new markets in Atlantic Canada and the New England states in its quest to grow the energy sector in New Brunswick.

As well, the Department of Energy will develop a new energy policy and review the existing *Electricity Act* to ensure it is meeting its public policy goals. Your government will continue its collaboration with a number of partners in the private and public sector to build on the momentum the province currently enjoys in the energy sector.

Finally, the department will continue to work closely with NB Power to ensure the publicly-owned utility operates as efficiently as possible for years to come.



New Brunswick's declining population is one of the most significant challenges facing our economy and our province today. New Brunswick must address a declining birth rate, an aging population, significant out-migration to other provinces, and labour shortages. New Brunswick businesses have identified human resource shortages as the biggest challenge for the next five years.

Your government recognizes that the goal of self-sufficiency cannot be met without addressing the challenge of population decline. Your government will very shortly outline a comprehensive plan to address the demographic challenges faced by our province.



Your government will redouble efforts to encourage economic development and job creation in all regions of the province. The Department of Business New Brunswick will aggressively pursue development opportunities in Canada and abroad and will reposition the province as being once again open for business.

Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of New Brunswick's economy. In the *Charter for Change*, a commitment was made to provide start-up capital of up to \$100,000 for new businesses and up to \$60,000 for business expansion and diversification. Your government will keep this commitment and will bring forward a program this year to stimulate capital investment for small business start-up, expansion, diversification and productivity improvement.



In order to encourage economic development, we must also ensure that the rights of those investing in our economy are protected.

A new *Franchises Act* will be introduced to provide a more level playing field for franchisors and franchisees. The legislation will benefit both small- and medium-size businesses and prospective businesses that operate in the franchise sector.

As well, your government will increase protection of consumers and investors by introducing amendments to the *Securities Act*. Your government will also be introducing legislation to modernize the regulation structure in the petroleum and mining sectors.



Self-sufficiency is a goal for all regions of New Brunswick whether they are rural or urban. Your government recognizes that some regions of the province face greater barriers to achieving self-sufficiency. That is why your government will create the Northern New Brunswick Initiative (NNBI), as outlined in the *Charter for Change*. This new initiative will be designed to ensure adequate infrastructure is made available for economic development in the northern parts of the province. This initiative will see government work with residents of Northern New Brunswick to develop a new, bold agenda for development, including the development of a new infrastructure program for northern and Miramichi regions.



Our rural-based resource industries are the historic cornerstones of New Brunswick's economy. These industries will continue to be economic pillars if they strive to adapt and modernize. Your government will continue to work with these sectors to ensure they are able to respond to current and future challenges and opportunities.

Our forest industry has been working hard to cut costs and remain profitable as it navigates through the challenges it faces. Your government will provide strategic financial assistance where industry can demonstrate it has a need, has a focused and realistic business plan, and is prepared to make a major financial investment in its own future.

In order to help reduce industry's reliance on fossil fuels, your government will make forest biomass available for co-generation. Biomass availability will be limited to the amount that can safely be removed from the forest floor without compromising the long-term health of our forests.

Your government will take steps to ensure that wood from private woodlots has equal and fair access to mills by requiring proportional movement of fibre from Crown land and private woodlots to mills throughout the year.

As well this spring, the Minister of Natural Resources will amend the current moose license draw system to improve the chances of success for those hunters who have not been successful in obtaining a moose license over many years.



Farming, both on land and on water, plays an important role in New Brunswick's economy. Your government will enter into negotiations with the federal government to renew the current Agriculture Policy Framework for 2008, following the extensive series of stakeholder consultations currently underway. The new policy will continue to provide income stabilization to help support the family farm, and it will also focus additional resources to support a competitive and innovative agriculture and agri-food sector for the long-term benefit of our rural economy.

Similarly, your government will enter into negotiations with the federal government for the development and implementation of a national aquaculture framework agreement, which will include business risk management programming.

In order for fishing communities to prosper, industry must be able to respond to changes in this sector. To help the province's fishermen and seafood processors meet the challenges facing the industry and take advantage of opportunities, your government will host the New Brunswick Fisheries Summit.



New Brunswickers have long recognized the lure of our province's natural beauty and rich culture. Your government is committed to working with the tourism industry to ensure New Brunswick remains a destination of choice.

The *Tourism Development Act*, which dates back to the 1970s, no longer adequately addresses the needs of the tourism industry. Your government is conducting an extensive consultation process with industry and will ensure a full consideration of industry's concerns with the current Act, particularly with respect to the licensing system for tourism accommodations.

Your government will dedicate resources to establishing and assisting a new agency that will work with all levels of government and the private sector on the development of a tourism strategy and action plan for Northern New Brunswick to capture the tourism growth opportunities of this beautiful and culturally rich area of the province.



Safe and efficient transportation links are essential to the economic development of our province. The completion of the four-lane Trans-Canada Highway this fall will provide an efficient trade corridor to move our products to export markets.

Your government will pursue the cooperation and partnership of the federal government in order to upgrade other roads that are part of Canada's national highway system, including routes 1, 7, 8, 11 and 17. During their mandate, your government will also significantly address the road infrastructure needs of rural New Brunswick.

Your government will be releasing, in conjunction with the other Atlantic Provinces, an Atlantic Canada Transportation Strategy. As part of the Atlantic region, we will be pressing the federal government to establish an Atlantic Gateway to take advantage of emerging global trading patterns and provide for significant economic development opportunities in our area. In addition, your government will be releasing a New Brunswick Multimodal Transportation Strategy later this year.

Your government met its commitment to provide the people of Grand Manan with a year-round, four-trip per day ferry schedule and your government intends to enter into contractual agreements for a new ferry to replace the MV Grand Manan.

Wildlife collisions on our highways will be addressed through the launch of an awareness campaign and other measures, including the start of the erection of wildlife fencing in June in areas with high incidence of moose/vehicle collisions.

A New Brunswick Intelligent Transportation Strategy document will be released late this year. The strategy will outline the development and deployment of new technologies for New Brunswick's transportation sector.



It is not only important that our highways be efficient, they must also be safe.

Your government will chart a course for safety by introducing legislation to make our highways and streets safer by introducing amendments to the *Motor Vehicle Act*. These changes will enable law enforcement to get tough on impaired drivers. Other measures will be introduced to reduce speeding, increase seat belt use and improve the safety of children travelling in vehicles.

As well, your government will make changes to the *Off-Road Vehicle Act* with specific attention to age of operation, training requirements, public awareness and education. Enforcement of these new changes will also be a priority.

Your government is committed to safe communities. We have seen the effects of organized crime and the illegal drug trade on our communities and your government will take steps to combat this.

Your government values the advice of its residents. In response to recommendations from a stakeholder review committee, your government will introduce amendments to the *Police Act*.



Your government recognizes the need to protect New Brunswickers' right to information pertaining to public policy decisions while at the same time protecting the private information of individuals. A review of access to information legislation will be initiated, including privacy legislation as it relates to health issues and the use of electronic health record technology.



In order to fully succeed on the road to self-sufficiency, your government is committed to ensuring that no New Brunswicker is left behind. Your government is committed to taking steps to protect those who are vulnerable and to ensure that all New Brunswickers are treated fairly and have their rights protected.

Your government is committed to protecting New Brunswick children and providing greater assistance to families. As a first step, the Department of Family and Community Services will be hiring 20 new legal assistants who will assume tasks related to the preparation of court documentation that have been performed by social workers. This will enable social workers to focus more on prevention and clinical therapeutic interventions.

Secondly, your government will introduce a mediation model as the primary form of dispute resolution in child protection cases. This model will enable families to become a key part of the process of resolving crisis situations and will also make court-ordered interventions an option of last resort.

Thirdly, your government will commence work on a new prevention-based multiple response service delivery model for providing services to families that fit their situation, from minor support to intensive services.

Adoption services are an integral part of building families in New Brunswick. In order to help children find permanent families, your government will modernize the adoption process by amending the *Family Services Act* as well as creating a new *Intercountry Adoption Act*. These changes will ensure that the best interests of the child are kept at the forefront of the adoption process. These amendments will also ensure a more effective delivery of services to New Brunswickers wishing to adopt a child.



Food, clothing and shelter are among the most basic and essential needs of a society. If New Brunswick is to achieve this vision of self-sufficiency, we must ensure that housing in New Brunswick is affordable and available. Your government will reinstate the New Brunswick Housing Corporation as a strong, proactive housing agency in order to address housing needs in both rural and urban New Brunswick. The corporation will partner with the private sector, municipalities, non-profit associations and other stakeholders to achieve its goal.

Additionally, the Department of Local Government anticipates the proclamation and filing of regulations pertaining to substandard housing by the end of this fiscal year.



New Brunswick's seniors have built our province. Your government is committed to treating them with dignity and respect. As our population ages, it will be imperative that we be prepared to provide our seniors with the right services at the right time. To achieve this end, your government will renew its long-term care strategy, with the objective to strengthen the continuum of care to ensure that it meets the current and future needs of seniors. This renewed strategy will establish goals which will guide your government as it addresses the challenges facing the long-term care system over the next 10 years.



On December 4, 2006, your government fulfilled its commitment to New Brunswick consumers to negotiate a fairer and improved automobile insurance product. As promised, all insurance companies have removed gender as a rating criterion to be effective March 1, 2007. Your government's objective of having industry reduce its 2006 rates, effective March 1, by a cumulative 13.5 per cent has also been realized.

Although much has been done, your government remains committed to ensuring the stability of automobile insurance rates. To this end, amendments will be made to the *Insurance Act* to make certain that the necessary tools are in place to allow New Brunswick drivers to continue to benefit from reasonable insurance rates and a fair insurance product.

As well, the process for establishing new territories will begin with the objective of having a redefined territorial structure in place by June 30, 2007, to permit the 2008 rate filings to reflect this more modern insurance regime.



In order that all New Brunswickers can participate in the journey to self-sufficiency, your government is committed to enabling more persons with disabilities to obtain the services and supports they need to be able to fully participate in the economic and social opportunities available to other residents of New Brunswick.

The Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons is working on a new provincial disability action plan and strategy based on input from the public. They are distributing a questionnaire on disability issues across the province and will be hosting a major Disability Stakeholders Summit at the end of May 2007. The final report and recommendations will be completed and presented to government and released publicly before the end of the coming fiscal year.



To be a self-sufficient province, New Brunswick must also be a well province.

By starting families early on the path to healthy lifestyles, we will see increased levels of wellness across our province. A new Select Committee on Wellness will be established to engage New Brunswickers on how to improve wellness in our province. Your government will also establish a Premier's Committee on Healthy Families to conduct an ongoing dialogue with New Brunswickers on healthy lifestyle choices.

By supporting and encouraging New Brunswickers to eat healthier, become more physically active, develop mental fitness and resiliency, and live tobacco-free lives, we can all help reduce illnesses and provide a healthy and positive role model for our children.



Rural communities have unique social, geographic, health and other characteristics that offer challenges, and more importantly, exciting opportunities to be innovative in our approach to improving both the health of rural New Brunswickers and access to services in rural areas.

Your government is strongly committed to providing quality health care in rural New Brunswick. We believe that New Brunswick can and will be a national leader in rural health delivery. To this end, your government will establish a provincial Rural Health Framework to improve access to services in rural areas. It will engage communities, health care providers and other key groups in the development of the framework.

Your government will consolidate ambulance services under a single ambulance operator to provide a province-wide ambulance system that will meet international standards of the Commission on Accreditation of Ambulance Services.

Existing ambulance operators will be treated fairly as New Brunswick transitions to the new province-wide system. As well, ambulance personnel working in the current system will be offered jobs in the new system and provided an opportunity to upgrade their skills to that of a primary care paramedic.

National and provincial reports on health care renewal highlight the importance of utilizing health care providers to their full competence and of health care providers working as part of a collaborative team. Your government will enhance the role of nurses, nurse practitioners and licensed practical nurses. Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner positions will also be created in all New Brunswick health regions to work in settings including sexual health clinics, community mental health centres and nursing homes.

Your government will modernize New Brunswick's public health legislation to make it more responsive to current needs and emerging issues like pandemic influenza. The *Public Health Act* will be proclaimed following amendments to better protect public health and make the public health system more flexible.

Many New Brunswickers are dealing with the daily reality of managing a lifelong chronic disease. Your government will undertake consultation with key advocacy and professional stakeholder groups to build on existing programs and best practices in New Brunswick. It will be implementing a staged approach to assist persons with diabetes to access necessary medications, supplies and devices.

In order to address issues associated with the misuse and abuse of narcotics and controlled drugs, your government will establish a Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) for New Brunswick. The PMP will be designed, in consultation with pharmacists and physicians, to provide information to prescribers to assist in patient care decision-making and promote optimal prescribing and utilization of monitored drugs. It is the first component of an Electronic Patient Record.

Building on the work to date accomplished by the Regional Health Authorities and the Department of Health, a provincial addictions strategy will be established to identify strategic directions and initiatives. Opportunities to further link addiction services with mental health and primary health care will be defined.







