

THRONE SPEECH REPORT CARD

An evaluation of promises made by the MacLauchlin government, 2015-2016

Office of the Third Party
10 November 2017

With the opening of each legislative session, the governing party outlines its plans and priorities in a Speech from the Throne. Delivered to the legislature by the Queen's representative, the Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island, the Throne Speech sets out the work that government intends to pursue during the session. On Tuesday, November 14th, 2017, government will present the third Speech from the Throne since Premier MacLauchlan was elected.

The current government's mandate is half over, so the Office of the Third Party thought it would be an appropriate time to issue a "mid-term report card" on government's actions towards achieving their goals. In preparing the report card, we tried to identify goals that were both significant and measurable. Some statements in the original speeches were not incorporated into the report card because they were minor tweaks to current programs or services; they were promises repeated from the 2015 Throne Speech; or the text was unclear on what government's actual intent was, thus making it impossible to grade. We have tried to assess government's success at implementing their own stated policies and targets, without judging the validity of those policies or targets themselves.

Links to the full speeches:

[1st Speech from the Throne, 3 June 2015](#)

[2nd Speech from the Throne, 5 April 2016](#)

1ST THRONE SPEECH, JUNE 3, 2015

Expense Disclosures for Senior and Political Staff

"My Government has taken action to increase the level of detail required for Ministerial disclosure of travel and hospitality expenditures, and to extend these strengthened requirements to senior officials and political staff."

This somewhat modest ambition has been completed.

Grade: A

Expanding Auditor General's Authority to Offices of the Legislature

"We will work with the Speaker and Assembly to bring all parts of the Legislature under the authority and review of the Auditor General."

No action has been taken on this promise.

Grade: F

Democratic Renewal

“During this mandate, My Government will initiate and support a thorough and comprehensive examination of ways in which to strengthen our electoral system, our representation, and the role and functioning of the Legislative Assembly.”

Not only was this promise unfulfilled but it led to a shocking betrayal of democratic principles. After the disastrous response to the clear Plebiscite result, government has been silent on other issues that relate to our election system, including election finance reform, voting age reform, etc. Not only have they not presented any viable solutions of their own, but they have rejected or mocked solutions proposed by others.

Grade: F

Whistleblower Protection

“We will implement a whistleblower policy with protections linked to the Commissioner of Ethics and Integrity.”

Although there were good intentions and the program was implemented on time, the Auditor General recommended that a policy was inadequate and that the protections needed to be entrenched in legislation. Government did introduce legislation that it then allowed to die on the order paper. If the legislation is passed the government could pull this mark up to a B, or even an A if it improves the legislation and requires an even higher level of accountability.

Grade: D

Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

“A positive and respectful relationship with First Nations Peoples is of fundamental importance to My Government. Building on the agreements that have been put in place, we will work collaboratively with Prince Edward Island’s First Nations to advance the interests of their communities and of Aboriginal Islanders.”

This is a difficult item to grade since the promise is so vague that it is almost meaningless. However, the grade is given because the government is now before the courts over the Mill River deal, a deal conceived in secrecy and delivered with incomprehensible taxpayer largesse. Indigenous-Crown relations seem to have reached a new low on Prince Edward Island.

Grade: D

French Language Services

“In 2013, government signed into law the French Language Services Act. We remain committed to ensuring that Acadian and francophone Islanders are full participants in all aspects of our governing.”

The first Complaints Officer resigned because government flatly ignored his recommendations.

Grade: F

Regional Advisory Bodies

“To better ensure local and regional input, advisory bodies will be developed for both the health and education systems.”

The regional bodies may very well achieve the stated goal, but the goal of gathering local input is largely meaningless because it keeps the public and many partners outside the decision-making process. Modern governance practice demands public involvement in decision-making; moving from hearing to empowering.

Grade: C-

Conflict of Interest

“Conflict of interest disclosure requirements have been strengthened for Ministers, senior management and political staff. The post-employment restrictions previously applying only to elected officials have been extended to senior management and political staff.”

This promise is far too modest in its scope. There should be a broader commitment to enhance conflict of interest provisions. Government could improve this grade to an A- if it fully implements all of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner’s recommendations made in his 2015 Annual Report. It could even achieve an A+ if in addition, it extended the post employment cooling off period to 24 months, which it is in some other jurisdictions.

Grade: D

Transparency

“My Government will work to make government information more transparent, including a review of our Freedom of Information legislation.”

Some work has been done on this initiative, however it is unlikely that the review and implementation of any changes will be completed during this mandate. It is equally troubling that government has taken four decisions by the Information and Privacy Commissioner to judicial review. It seems unlikely a passing grade will be achieved. There has, however, been some progress made on putting more government information on the provincial government’s website, but it has been done at the absolute lowest level of open data.

Grade: Incomplete

Ethics and Integrity

“The position of Ethics and Integrity Commissioner has been established, and a highly-esteemed former public servant has been appointed to the post.”

Although we support the work of the Commissioner, for this position to have any meaning the Commissioner must be an independent officer of the legislature. Public trust requires that the Commissioner cannot be reporting to the Premier through the Public Service Commission.

Grade: C

Municipal Reform

“We will work with local governments to start the process to develop a new Municipal Government Act aimed at increasing accountability, accessibility, transparency, responsiveness and efficiency.”

New and more modern legislation has indeed been passed and is apparently near being proclaimed. The Municipal Governance Act does fulfill the stated goals. However, government has never clearly stated its overall vision for local governance on PEI (Is it Island-wide incorporation? Larger regional municipalities?). This lack of communication, especially with smaller rural municipalities, has led to confusion and conflict in and among Island communities.

Grade: B

Economic Growth

“My Government will focus on growing the economy and increasing trade and exports to generate wealth and revenues.”

This government has put significant effort into growing our economy, however, there may be reason to question the appropriateness of placing so much of our economic future into a single basket over which we have very little control. By focusing on export markets we make ourselves vulnerable to currency fluctuations, energy costs, and large political issues such as the renegotiation of NAFTA. Even small changes in these areas could make our local economy extremely vulnerable.

Grade: C-

Sales Force PEI

“Through Sales Force PEI, we will initiate an aggressive prospecting and sales strategy that builds on many of our province’s strengths in sectors and workforce to advance our sales into international markets.”

We could only find one uncertain mention of it since the initial announcement in 2015. No updates or progress or results have been published.

Grade: Unknown

Generic Drug Program

“During this Legislative session, we will initiate the requirements for the Prince Edward Island Generic Drug Plan, which will cap the cost of generic drugs at a price lower than twenty dollars for uninsured Islanders under the age of 65.”

This is an important program. It falls short of universal pharmacare, but given the provincial government’s limited resources this is an important initiative that complements the recently introduced catastrophic drug program to ensure that Islanders have access to the medications that they need.

Grade: A

MLA Compensation, Size of Cabinet

“We are committed to leading by example. My Government has already decreased the number of Cabinet portfolios and members. We have reduced the cumulative operating budgets of the Premier’s, Executive Council and Ministers’ Offices. We will further review MLA compensation and benefits, and specifically will bring forward proposals to reduce transitional allowances for MLAs, and will increase accountability and oversight of expense claims.”

Although the budgets of individual offices has decreased, it is unclear how much of this decrease came from centralizing certain services, such as Communications and Human Resources. In spite of good intentions, the number of Ministers and the number of backbenchers taking on additional roles, such as committee membership or Government House Leader has significantly increased since this Throne Speech. For example, the Minister of Rural and Regional Development seems to have a Ministry with no mandate, and staff and programs borrowed from other departments. It is hard to believe this appointment was not pure political theatre. No movement has been made on the issue of transitional allowances for MLAs.

Grade: D

Land and Water

“My Government’s new Department of Communities, Land and Environment will, as a priority, address the central issues of land and water use. In addition to near-term engagement on the Water Act, the Department will, through active engagement with local communities, develop a renewed Planning Act and continue with the process of revising the Lands Protection Act.”

The development of the Water Act has largely been a positive process. It included extensive public consultations, which were a definite improvement over other government engagement processes, though there is still (always) room for improvement. The Act has yet to be tabled in the Legislature, so it is difficult to determine the success of the initiative. Tabled and passing this Legislation would improve the grade. With only a minor amendment to the Lands Protection Act, little progress has been made on the Lands Protection and Planning Acts.

Grade: C

Raising Personal Tax Exemption

“This spring, we will introduce the necessary amendments to the Income Tax Act which will assist over 12,000 lower income Islanders, more than 2,000 of whom will no longer pay personal income tax.”

Although raising the personal exemption was useful, PEI still has the lowest personal exemption in Canada, and the Finance Minister did not do himself credit when he claimed not to know how PEI’s personal exemption was rated relative to other provinces during second reading of the bill.

Grade: C

Attracting Immigrant Entrepreneurs

“My Government will strengthen the administration of our programs to attract immigrant entrepreneurs. We will expand programs like Community Connections to help immigrants link to investment and career opportunities.”

There has been significant uptake on the immigrant investor program, however it is not yet clear whether this will lead to long term economic and population growth that will enhance prosperity for all Islanders. Much of the rush to recruit thousands in the PNP program is reminiscent of the former program where much of the economic benefits were enjoyed by a small group of people and very little effort was put into long-term retention. Less secrecy could improve this grade.

Grade: B-

Mental Health Strategy

“[M]y Government will engage Islanders in the development of a Mental Health Strategy that seeks to meet the needs of those struggling with mental illness and addictions.”

The government has developed a ten year strategy, but so far the strategy has not been successful at meeting the immediate needs of Islanders. Progress has been made with the development of new methadone clinics, and government has just released an action plan to prevent opioid overdoses and deaths. However, the Chief Medical Officer for Mental Health and Addictions, Dr. Keizer has described this as “a time of crisis.” The Island has less than ten full-time- equivalent psychiatrists practicing out of a complement of 15 and a desired complement of 17. The Hillsborough Hospital needs to be replaced. Government talks about the need for a suicide strategy while Islanders die. These are complex problems with no easy fix, but what is apparent is that government needs to do better.

Grade: D

Repatriating Islanders

“My Government will launch a comprehensive strategy to repatriate Islanders living away.”

Government has developed a population action plan and is meeting its population targets. However, out-migration continues to be a problem. According to the 2015-2016 Statistical Review, there were 729 more Islanders migrating from PEI to other provinces than people from other provinces moving to PEI.

Grade: B

Youth Entrepreneurship and Engagement

“My Government will place particular emphasis on coalescing our community of young people to build better engagement and opportunity for them to live and thrive on Prince Edward Island. Through creative and entrepreneurship spaces, we will provide an ability for them to start their own business and social enterprise, and to engage with and support each other as they do.”

Government has created a youth advisory council and the Startup Zone. Another advisory body to give advice to government is not really change, especially if government does nothing with that advice, as is often the case. The Startup Zone seems to be an early success (it's certainly popular), but the lasting results of the initiative will need to be evaluated. Both these initiatives have potential, but could be improved by better performance reporting and better engagement.

Grade: B

‘Canada’s Food Island’

“My Government will build on this strength with a strategic emphasis on the Island’s Food Sector. Underlining the premium quality of our land and sea-based products, and drawing from our talent in food research, we will actively advance a brand for Prince Edward Island as ‘Canada’s Food Island.’”

Government has fulfilled this promise, though it could improve the grade by providing more information to evaluate the performance and effects of the program.

Grade: B+

Engagement with Communities and Advisory Councils

“We will work with our new district advisory councils, community leaders, parents and educators to ensure that our services meet the front-line needs of our students.”

All indications so far are that government is not working collaboratively with the advisory councils, not involving them in the decision-making process, and not responding to their recommendations in a timely manner. There is no evidence that any of the advice received from the councils has led to any substantive change. While government did engage communities on school reorganization, that engagement was woefully inadequate.

Grade: D-

2ND THRONE SPEECH, APRIL 5, 2016

Population Growth

“My Government’s overall target is to grow the population of Prince Edward Island to 150,000, and to do so as early as the end of 2017 - Canada’s 150th Anniversary.”

This population target was achieved. It is hoped that the new immigrants that make up the bulk of this population growth will settle permanently on the Island and prosper in their new homeland.

Grade: A

Student Employment

“In this year, we will support the creation of 1000 employment opportunities for students to obtain employment with non-for-profit, public and private sector employers.”

Government appears to have carried out this commitment, although budget documents suggest a significant portion of the increase may have been due to increased support from the federal government.

Grade: A

Access to Health Services

“My Government is committed to continuing investments to frontline services that improve health access in Prince Edward Island. We will increase the number of nurse practitioners, expand their scope of practice, and develop a rural recruitment program to enhance access in rural settings. Additional specialists in high need areas will be added.”

Recruitment and retention of medical personnel remains an issue. Islanders continue to languish on the patient registry, the lack of psychiatrists has led the Medical Director of Mental Health and Addictions to refer to the situation as a crisis. Many of the challenges are outside of government’s control, however health care seems to be funded to the brink of collapse, and more effort should be focused on health promotion and disease prevention.

Grade: D+

New Education Act

“In this Session, we will specifically consider a new Education Act that enables this rejuvenation.”

The Act was passed, but whether it rejuvenates anything is up for debate. Indeed, the handling of the School Review process created unnecessary conflict, distrust towards government, and ongoing zoning issues. Government has also faced criticism over its lack of action on the recommendations from the advisory councils. It is not at all clear that the new structures created in the Act will lead to rejuvenation in education.

Grade: B-

Women’s Reproductive Health Centre

“The Women’s Reproductive Health Centre will be established this year, providing a range of reproductive health services to Island women.”

The introduction of abortion services on PEI is a significant step forward for women’s rights and the health and wellbeing of Island women. We commend the government for having the political courage to move forward on this initiative, even if it did take a legal challenge. This grade could easily be upgraded to an A, if government improved the range of reproductive supports provided to Island families, including *in vitro* reproductive services and continue to enhance post-partum supports.

Grade: B

Parking at QEH

“To better support patients and visitors, we will address parking arrangements at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital by putting in place the best solution possible.”

Everyone likes free parking!

Grade: A

Health Advisory Councils

“New Community Health Advisory Councils will bring community engagement and perspectives more consistently to the development and delivery of healthcare services across the province.”

The Community Health Engagement Committees have been established, but none of their meeting minutes or reports to the Minister are publicly available. Therefore it is impossible to assess the effectiveness of the initiative.

Grade: Unknown

Youth Mental Health Services

“Prince Edward Island’s first Youth Mental Health Day Treatment Program will open this spring, supporting 50-60 Island youth each year.”

This is an important new program, and government should be commended for initiating it. However, it is just one small step forward to fix a Mental Health and Addictions treatment system that is in crisis.

Grade: A

Review of Long-Term Care Services

“My Government has initiated a review of the continuum of home care, community care and long-term care services.”

With PEI’s aging population this review is important. However, there are issues in long-term care that require immediate attention and cannot wait for the review to be completed. There are beds ready and available that could accommodate some of the seniors currently on the waiting-list but government refuses to issue any new licences. When it was suggested they could issue temporary licences until the review is completed they still refused to issue licences. Government can improve this grade by actually completing the review and moving forward on positive change.

Grade: C

Energy Strategy

“We will emphasize the increased development of renewable energy, as well as work to mitigate against the effects of climate change.”

“A new Energy Strategy will be developed to identify the best way forward for Prince Edward Island and its residents to plan for a lower carbon regime. The new electrical cable project, to be undertaken in the fall of this year, will upgrade the province’s capacity to connect to new import and export possibilities for energy use.”

The new Energy Strategy has been developed, and a few small initiative have been undertaken. However, several large questions around the implementation of the strategy (eg. whether it will meet our GHG reduction commitments), and elements that were left out of the strategy (ex. carbon pricing), remain unanswered. The cable project was completed, and on budget.

Grade: B+

Housing Supports

“My Government will continue to provide support for the housing needs faced by Islanders. More support will be provided for rent supplements, home renovations and home supports for seniors.”

The federal and provincial government has jointly announced \$7.2 million in additional supports, which are both needed and appreciated. However, much more needs to be done to improve housing. Access to secure affordable housing is fundamental to addressing a wide range of health and wellness issues.

Grade: B

Regulating Lobbyists

“...we will introduce in the Fall of 2016 a new Lobbyist Registration Act that will require the registration of anyone who transacts or develops business with government.”

Legislation was introduced but never debated. Like so many initiatives around government accountability, there has been a noteworthy drop in enthusiasm. Government could increase this grade to a B by reintroducing and passing this bill, or an A if they address criticisms of the initial bill.

Grade: D

Civil Service and MLA Compensation

“My Government will review future benefit arrangements in the public service, including service gratuity. We will follow through on our commitment to bring forward proposals to reduce transitional allowances for MLAs.”

It does not seem that government intends to act on either issue. The transitional allowance for MLAs was mentioned in the previous Throne Speech and has still not resulted in action..

Grade: F

Campaign Finance Reform

“We will introduce new legislation around campaign financing to meet best practices.”

This is the second biggest disappointment from this government. The Premier originally promised a comprehensive reform that would ban corporate and union donations which is the current “best practice” in Canada. The Premier then changed his mind, putting the interests of his party ahead of the citizens of PEI. Yet, he still has not introduced a watered down version of the bill.

Grade: F

Disclosure of Loan Write-Offs

“We will re-introduce a strengthened Financial Administration Act that commits to provisions that disclose write-offs and cancellations of loans to the province.”

This was completed, but only after opposition parties demanded an amendment to make disclosures mandatory rather than voluntary.

Grade: A-

Open Government

“Working across government, we will implement a policy of Open Government and a practice of Open Data.”

This initiative started off well, but very little new data has been added since its original launch. Also much of the data provided is summary data only. Users must manually download every file. In addition, outside the data portal, most government information published online is in PDF form, which is difficult to work with. Open data standards should be used everywhere on the government site. This grade could easily be raised by following through on this commitment and making this a government priority once again.

Grade: C-

Exploring Opportunities to Support the Aboriginal Community

“My Government will continue working together with Aboriginal leaders to explore new opportunities to support the well-being and prosperity of the Mi’kmaq and broader Aboriginal community on Prince Edward Island.”

This promise is similar to the promise in the 2015 Throne Speech, in that it articulates a commitment without attaching any specific or measurable action to that commitment. In light of the current lawsuit around the Mill River Resort development we have not seen an improvement in the relationship between Indigenous Islanders and the provincial government.

Grade: D

2015 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Promise	Grade
Expense Disclosures for Senior and Political Staff	A
Expanding Auditor General's Authority to Offices of the Legislature	F
Democratic Renewal	F
Whistleblower Protection	D
Relationship with Indigenous Peoples	D
French Language Services	F
Regional Advisory Bodies	C-
Conflict of Interest	D
Transparency	Incomplete
Ethics and Integrity	C
Municipal Reform	B
Economic Growth	C-
Sales Force PEI	Unknown
Generic Drug Program	A
MLA Compensation, Size of Cabinet	D
Land and Water	C
Raising Personal Tax Exemption	C
Attracting Immigrant Entrepreneurs	B-
Mental Health Strategy	D
Repatriating Islanders	B
Youth Entrepreneurship and Engagement	B
'Canada's Food Island'	B+
Engagement with Communities and Advisory Councils	D-

2016 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Promise	Grade
Population Growth	A
Student Employment	A
Access to Health Services	D+
New Education Act	B-
Women's Reproductive Health Centre	B
Parking at QEH	A
Health Advisory Councils	Unknown
Youth Mental Health Services	A
Review of Long-Term Care Services	C
Energy Strategy	B+
Housing Supports	B
Civil Service and MLA Compensation	F
Regulating Lobbyists	D
Campaign Finance Reform	F
Disclosure of Loan Write-Offs	A-
Open Government	C-
Exploring Opportunities to Support the Aboriginal Community	D