

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY *Under embargo until speech begins*

Date: **April 20, 2015 - Charlottetown**

Good morning everyone. Thank you for coming.

I am happy to be here today with other members of our Liberal Team to talk about the very important subject of education.

As most people know, I have spent most of my life directly connected to the field of education as a student ... a professor ... a dean ... culminating in 12 years as president of a very fine university. UPEI offers to all Islanders an inspiring example of what can be accomplished through education when we have a vision, a commitment to excellence, and a high degree of collaboration -- combined with leadership.

I am pleased to be here at UPEI today to announce our Liberal party's vision and platform for education. It carries the title: "21st Century Learning – 21st Century Workforce."

Over the years I feel I have learned a lot about what works and what doesn't ... about the strengths of our educational system ... and the areas that require emphasis and improvement.

What's more, I have learned the importance of listening and learning. Education is by nature a collaborative enterprise. It starts with a community that values education and sees it as a critical factor in growth and development. Teachers are essential players. A successful system of education must be teacher-led. Educational administration involves many delicate balances, expert opinions and evidence-based decisions. The role of government is to offer support, not to step into the place of teachers and administrators.

I truly believe education is the basis of society. It enriches our lives and our communities, it prepares us for future success, and ultimately a successful education system will see our province move forward.

That is why it is so important that we always strive for excellence, and focus our energies and resources on student learning and achievement.

We must also work collaboratively with parents, teachers, and organizations like Home and School to ensure the best outcomes for our students.

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Leader's Remarks

Education is a lifelong endeavour. A Liberal Government will support student achievement in throughout the entire educational experience – from early childhood, to K-12, post-secondary, and lifelong training and educational programs.

I believe strongly in the importance of early childhood education ... and I am proud of the record of achievement that we have in this Province.

Organizations like CHANCES and programs like Best Start make an important and positive contribution to the lives of Island pre-school children.

On the CHANCES web site there is a quote from Dr. Fraser Mustard who said that “the early years last forever.” I couldn't agree more.

I am proud to say that the Liberal Government has provided strong support to pre-school organizations and programs ... and is considered to have one of the best pre-school systems in the country.

These organizations are deserving of our support and under a New Liberal Government this support will continue.

Specifically, a New Liberal Government will maintain an annual commitment of \$1.2 million dollars to CHANCES to provide programs and supports for children from birth to 36 months ... and a further \$60,000 a year for five years to support literacy programs for these families.

The integration of kindergarten into our primary school system is something we are very proud of. It was something that needed to occur ... and it took a Liberal Government to make it happen.

The introduction of kindergarten into the school system ... combined with other pre-school supports ... provides a very strong foundation for young Island children entering grade one.

And this is where the focus must be ... on the student.

Throughout the pre-school, primary, secondary and post-secondary components of the educational system ... the Liberal Party believes that educational resources must be focused ... to the greatest extent possible ... on enriching the learning experience of students.

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Leader's Remarks

We firmly believe that if we want students to have better outcomes ... we must give them the tools ... and the opportunity ... to succeed.

Time spent on task is an important component of improving student outcomes. A Liberal Government will work with parents and teachers and educational administrators to find opportunities to maximize classroom time.

Our teachers go above and beyond to support our students and encourage them to develop a lifelong love of learning.

We have financial challenges in this Province and limited resources. We must be careful with our tax dollars. But we recognize education is an investment in our province's future and we are committed to our students. A Liberal Government will continue to invest in the frontlines, and make it a priority to direct financial and human resources to front-line services.

We must also ensure that when students are in the classroom, they are able to focus on their lessons. Unfortunately, we know this is not the case when a child is hungry.

That is why we are committing to a doubling of current funding for school breakfast and lunch programs.

It is an unfortunate fact that many Island children come to school hungry.

As indicated in a resolution put forward at the recent Home and School Federation's meeting, one in five children in PEI live in households affected by some level of food insecurity.

This commitment will come with a condition: that the food for this program must be healthy and must be locally purchased.

The Liberty Party is also committed to students with special needs ... we will undertake a review of current programs to ensure that the right supports are being provided.

We will also ensure students and teachers have the tools they need to succeed by continuing to focus on 21st Century Learning skills, blending core curriculum with creativity and innovation skills, digital literacy, and career and life skills. We will ensure students have the technologies required to apply knowledge to new situations, collaborate, use critical thinking skills, and problem solve.

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Leader's Remarks

As was announced in the Speech from the Throne in November, the Liberal Government is committed to a significant capital program to enhance classroom technology.

A New Liberal Government will continue with this capital program at a total cost of \$8 million over five years.

This will include the purchase of 7,000 new computers by 2016-17 and ... as I committed to at the recent Home and School Federation forum ... Wi-Fi in all Island schools by 2016.

A New Liberal Government will also continue to make substantial capital investments in our schools.

As you know ... school construction projects in Montague and Souris were recently completed.

A New Liberal Government will move forward with additional investments ... including a significant capital investment at Three Oaks Senior High of \$15 million over three years and the completion of the project at Ecole Francois Buote.

We will also take steps to continue modernizing our fleet of schools buses to ensure safe and reliable transportation for Island students ... replacing approximately 20 buses per year.

As I mentioned earlier, it is essential that we collaborate with parents, teachers, and students to ensure student achievement is at the centre of all decisions. The Liberal Party also believes in giving parents greater opportunity for input.

A New Liberal Government will move forward with school board elections in 2016. We believe that parents and community leaders play an invaluable role in our educational system ... and that their input is important.

To ensure community input and effective communication, we will establish district advisory councils similar to the district health advisory councils that were announced during the first week of the campaign.

The establishment of these councils is one additional example of our commitment to increasing engagement with Islanders and Island communities.

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Leader's Remarks

As you know, post-secondary education is something that I feel very strongly about. I am pleased that it is another part of the educational system where much progress has been made.

The Liberal Party believes that all Island students, regardless of their socio-economic background, must have the opportunity to attend a post-secondary institution.

Maintaining affordability is crucial, and that is why the previous Liberal Government introduced a range of financial measures designed to support Island post-secondary students ... including a 0 per cent interest rate on Prince Edward Island student loans ... the George Coles Bursary ... the Island Skills Awards ... and the Island Student Awards.

Significant improvement has been made since 2006 in both university and college levels of attainment. In my view, this positive development is a direct result of the assistance that has been provided by the Liberal Government.

A New Liberal Government will continue these financial supports and will work in cooperation with Island post-secondary students to explore additional ways of improving access to ... and the affordability of ... post-secondary education.

Specifically, acting on the advocacy of the Student Union, we will increase the period following graduation to when repayment requirements begin from six months to 12 months. A Liberal Government will increase the maximum student loan to \$175 a week, up from \$165, and will index to inflation in the future.

We have also heard the concerns of students regarding eligibility. A Liberal Government will review the student loan process to explore the impact of student and parental contribution requirements on eligibility thresholds.

UPEI, Holland College and Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É. are of strategic importance to Prince Edward Island's continued success.

A New Liberal Government will continue to support strategic capital and operational investments ... and will work with these institutions to develop multi-year funding plans. We will enhance the importance of these relationships and of the strategic role of a trained and talented workforce to 21st century success by creating a new ministry of Workforce and Advanced Learning.

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Leader's Remarks

We will support the new UPEI Engineering School. This program will be unique to Canada and focus on mechatronics, bioresources, and sustainable energy engineering, which is well-aligned with our province's strategic growth sector of bioscience, IT, renewable energy, and aerospace, as well as a new and promising cluster in marine technologies.

We will provide Holland College with capital funding to support a new performance arts hall. This hall will be home to the program's Performing Arts Program and will also be available for community use.

Holland College plays a key role in trades training and has graduated many students who have found successful careers in many of our province's economic sectors. A Liberal Government will continue to support Holland College in these efforts.

In addition, we are committed to increasing opportunities for French speaking Islanders to access a broader range of post-secondary programs in the language of their choice. Too often, French speaking Islanders are forced to leave the province to pursue studies in French.

We will support an innovative new partnership between College Acadie and Holland College to provide unique opportunities for students of both schools. This would include a greater French presence on the Charlottetown campus and allow students to keep up their French while attending college.

Beyond post-secondary institutions we will continue to invest educational and training opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development. A Liberal Government will establish a department of workforce and advanced learning. The change signals a new shift in emphasis towards a commitment to lifelong learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen ... education is a topic of significant importance to Islanders. Parents ... teachers and policymakers all have the same goal ... to provide a quality learning environment for Island students. We have made a tremendous amount of progress over the past several years and a New Liberal Government will keep up that good work.

Thank you for coming.

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