

2001-2002 Capital Estimates

Mr. Speaker:

Today I am pleased to present the 2001-2002 Capital Estimates for consideration of the House.

In putting together the capital budget, the government has demonstrated that it will continue to manage smarter and to spend taxpayers' dollars wisely. As a government, we must think like homeowners who decide to remodel but dream of more lavish renovations than their budget will allow. Like most homeowners, we want to live within our means.

We have weighed our commitment to balanced budgets with the ongoing need to improve physical infrastructure. Choices were made based on clear public priorities, Mr. Speaker.

As a government, our guiding principle is to build only what we need and to make sure that we can adequately maintain what we already have.

Capital budget 30% higher than last year

By applying this principle, I am pleased to inform the House that members will be asked to consider a gross capital budget of \$197.2 million for 2001-2002.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to report that the capital budget for the coming fiscal year is 30 per cent higher than last year's budget. This amount stems from solid fiscal management, proper planning and a good economy. It also reflects a continuing commitment to make New Brunswick a better place to live, to work and to raise a family.

The 2001-2002 Capital Estimates will focus on health and safety issues affecting New Brunswickers. We will provide capital funds to protect the health and safety of people where they live, where they learn, where they work and do business, and where they travel.

As always with a capital budget, individual ministers will provide the specifics of the various projects. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my colleagues will be both eager and proud to share the details as soon as appropriate.

Health and safety where we live

Today I will provide some highlights. First, let us take a look at funding for projects that will protect the health and safety of New Brunswickers where they live.

One of our key investments this year will be \$9.5 million under the Canada-New Brunswick Infrastructure Program Agreement. Matching contributions to this program will be made by the federal and municipal levels of government under this six-year, \$163.3 million partnership.

This will mean a significant investment in "green local government infrastructure" in the coming year. The key priorities will be to ensure safe drinking water, wastewater systems, water management and solid waste management.

I can think of nothing more fundamental than clean drinking water for our citizens. Our investment in this program will do much to improve our facilities and the quality of life for young and old.

Mr. Speaker, honourable members may recall that some emergency work is under way this fall to address safety concerns in the East Musquash watershed. I am very pleased to announce a further allocation of \$2 million to rehabilitate earth dams in that watershed. Stabilization of the dams to protect Saint John's water source is a prime concern, and we are pleased to contribute to this important project.

The creation of jobs and wealth, the creation of greater opportunity is one of our top motivations in this government. Our commitment reaches into every corner of the province.

My fellow cabinet ministers will bring the details of other projects which will benefit people where they live. I can refer to a few here today:

- \$5.2 million under the Regional Economic Development Agreement to fund economic development priorities;
- \$1 million in capital projects under the Acadian Peninsula economic development initiative;
- \$500,000 for Clean Water Control Grants;
- \$500,000 for Local Service Districts to pay for capital renovations to fire halls, improvements to fire department equipment, etc;
- \$500,000 to make much-needed repairs to various facilities in our provincial parks;
- \$300,000 for replacement and maintenance of aboiteaux to help prevent flooding of farmlands and highways.

Health and safety where we learn

Turning now from "where we live" to "where we learn," I would like to speak about capital funding which will be dedicated to improve our schools and community colleges. As a father of five children and the grandfather of two, I know that education is a way to offer greater opportunity to our children and to our adult learners. It is a way to build the future of our province.

Therefore, I am proud to say that, again this year, the capital budget contains \$34 million for New Brunswick's schools.

Honorable members will recall our commitment to spend \$100 million over four years under the Healthy Schools Program. Today's budget includes \$25 million as the second instalment of our continuing commitment to that important program.

The Minister of Education will be happy to elaborate soon on the specific projects to be funded, Mr. Speaker.

In deciding how to allocate scarce dollars, the government had some difficult choices to make. One seemed somewhat easier because, quite frankly, it was long overdue and had been overlooked for too long.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the \$34 million for schools, the capital budget provides the community college network with \$2 million for repairs and renovations.

This level of funding to repair deficiencies will no doubt come as a welcome relief to the people who work and learn in our many community college buildings throughout the province. Those buildings, and the needs of the people who teach and study there, were basically ignored for many years by the previous government.

Our predecessors did not take a strategic, multi-year approach to address the improvement and the modernization of these facilities. I am proud to tell the students and community college staff in this province that we will show leadership and do it better.

Health and safety where we work and do business

This leads me to a discussion of capital funding in support of the health and safety issues in government buildings where so many people work and do business.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to state clearly that the employees work long and hard to provide good service to the public. Their concerns about their work environment deserve our consideration and taxpayers' dollars wherever possible.

I am pleased to announce that the government will spend \$8.7 million to improve the level of security and operational efficiency in the Miramichi courthouse. Honourable members are well aware of the old, outdated building and its deficiencies, Mr. Speaker.

The result will be an improved delivery of justice services in this region. The 2001-2002 capital estimates contain \$1.8 million so that this expansion project can begin shortly. The majority of the work will be completed during 2002-2003. I am certain that the Minister of Justice will be happy to provide additional details shortly.

Mr. Speaker, this government is conscious of the importance of heritage and of its stewardship role in preserving our history. We intend to honor our past by making a \$5 million commitment, over two years, to design and build an addition to the Provincial Archives building on the UNB campus in Fredericton. This will offer a climate-controlled repository for the preservation of many thousands of official records and historical documents. In 2001-2002, we will spend \$500,000 on the design of a project that has been needed for many, many years. We are proud to be the government that shows leadership in this regard.

This government will commit further funds to other projects to improve the conditions of provincial buildings where people work and do business, including:

- \$3.5 million for roof inspections, emergency repairs, ventilation upgrading and drainage;
- \$1.4 million for facilities of the Department of Natural Resources and Energy;
- \$1 million for Department of Transportation's buildings and other facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of patients in our hospitals is also an important consideration as we strive to build a more compassionate New Brunswick. This year's capital budget includes \$9.4 million to address capital priorities in the health system. This includes:

- \$6.9 million for various capital improvements and renovations;
- \$2.5 million for capital equipment.

The Minister of Health and Wellness will provide further details concerning this \$9.4 million capital investment in our health system.

Health and safety where we travel

Mr. Speaker, my next topic concerns money to be spent for health and safety issues where we travel.

One of our biggest areas in capital expenditures is transportation because safe, efficient roads are paramount for our citizens and our economy. The capital budget for transportation in 2001-2002 is \$116.7 million.

We have increased the funding for the Highway Improvement Program by 59 per cent to \$40.9 million. The Minister of Transportation will describe where the funds will be spent throughout the province.

The government has also increased funding by 11 per cent for construction of local roads and bridges in our province for a total of \$75.7 million. The funds will be spent to maintain the long-term integrity of our infrastructure. I am sure this is welcome news to the road builders and to people in rural New Brunswick.

Mr. Speaker, roads bring our goods to market. Roads also bring tourists to our province. That is why the capital budget contains \$1.2 million for Business New Brunswick to build a brand new River Valley Tourist Information Centre in the Fredericton area.

This visitor information centre will entice motorists to stop and find out more about New Brunswick's sights and culture. The new facility will roll out the welcome mat next summer.

Greater opportunity for New Brunswickers

Mr. Speaker, the capital budget certainly offers greater opportunity to our citizens. For some, it will mean clean water, healthy schools, safer buildings and better roads. For others, it will mean a pay cheque as they work on a road crew or a roofing job.

Despite an increase in the capital budget of 30 per cent over last year, I know that some people will say the government has not done enough. The demands always exceed the dollars available, but it is my firm belief that the government has made wise choices in this capital budget. We have focused on clear public priorities – health and safety. And we have weighed the need for improved infrastructure with the need for a balanced budget and good financial management.

We have made every effort to provide greater opportunity for people who live and work throughout the province. We have also made every effort to be strategic in our capital investment decisions – not just for today, but for tomorrow. We will build only what we need and ensure that we can adequately maintain what we already have.

We have made sure to address health and safety concerns of New Brunswickers where they live, where they learn, where they work and do business, and where they travel.

Like the homeowners who want to renovate but who have to be realistic in their plans, we have made sensible, affordable decisions. My cabinet colleagues will look forward to offering further details about the projects under the capital estimates in the days ahead.

Mr. Speaker, it will be my pleasure to return to this chamber in the spring to outline the 2001-2002 Main Estimates for the province. In the meantime, I salute the road builders, suppliers, tradespeople and other New Brunswick workers who will soon roll up their sleeves and get these capital spending jobs done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.