

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE



At the opening of the
Second Session
of the Sixty-seventh
General Assembly of
the Prince Edward Island
Legislature

March 25th, 2025

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Delivered by
The Honourable Dr. Wassim Salamoun
Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island

At the opening of the Second Session of the
Sixty-seventh General Assembly of the
Prince Edward Island Legislature

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Strengthening our domestic markets will provide stability and help reduce the reliance on international exports.

Introduction

Good Afternoon. Bonjour. Kwe.

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Members of the Legislative Assembly, invited guests, and fellow Islanders—it is my great honour as the representative of His Majesty The King, to welcome you to the second session of the 67th General Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

This marks a new chapter for our province, with a new Premier and renewed leadership committed to building on the progress we have made while setting a course for our future.

We acknowledge the contributions of the past and the leadership that has brought us to this moment. But today, we look ahead—to the work still to be done, the opportunities before us, and our responsibility to secure our future.

We begin this session at a pivotal moment for our province, our country, and the world. Islanders, like all Canadians, are facing economic uncertainty, rising costs, and trade instability that create new challenges for our province. Our closest friend and ally is threatening our sovereignty, intentionally wreaking havoc on our economy, and ignoring the long history we have of working together, side-by-side, for the benefit of both our nations; but here we are, and as we've done many times before—as Islanders and as Canadians—we will band together and get through this, together.

Securing our Economy

One of the most pressing concerns for our province is the ongoing threat of tariffs on our exports. Tariffs are disrupting long-standing partnerships and putting Island jobs and businesses at risk. The situation is unpredictable, and we must be ready to respond.

Our government is standing up for Islanders and working to secure their future by addressing the impacts of these tariffs head-on. Through *Protecting Our Future*, our tariff response plan, we are providing direct support to affected businesses, strengthening trade partnerships, exploring new markets, and ensuring Island industries have the tools they need to navigate this challenge.

We are part of Team Canada. We are working alongside our federal, provincial, and territorial partners to push back against these unfair tariffs and ensure a strong and united response. We will take steps to reduce internal trade barriers, ensuring businesses can operate more efficiently and workers can access job opportunities across jurisdictions. Legislative changes will be introduced to support these efforts, fostering growth and competitiveness for Island businesses in a changing economic landscape.

Expanding domestic market opportunities will also be a priority, helping Island producers and businesses explore new ways to sell their products within Canada. Strengthening our domestic markets will provide stability and help reduce the reliance on international exports.

To further support Island businesses and build consumer confidence, my government is proud to support the province-wide Shop Local campaign, launched in partnership with the Island Chambers of Commerce. This campaign encourages Islanders to choose local businesses first—helping to grow our economy, create jobs, and keep more of our dollars working here at home.

Ending the biggest trade barrier Islanders face will remain a key focus—the tolls on the Confederation Bridge and Wood Islands ferry. These costs place an unfair burden on Islanders and hold back our economy. It is time to end the tolls.

We also need to think differently about how we get our goods to market. My government will explore the creation of a shipping port on Prince Edward Island, and other critical infrastructure to connect us to new and emerging markets around the globe for our world-class products.

To make our province more competitive, my government will also introduce tax cuts to help support companies, including small businesses, to reinvest in their businesses during these challenging times.

My government will also work with industries to build workforce strategies, focused on each sector, to ensure we are supporting them in building the future pipeline of talent needed to meet the demands of their sectors. To support Island businesses in expanding their reach, we will double our number of trade missions this year, increase support to attend trade missions, and develop new partnerships that open doors to new export markets.

For our food producers in our agriculture, fishing, and aquaculture sectors, my government will help to promote Island products across the country and encourage Canadians to purchase our world-class products. At the same time, my government will aggressively pursue new markets and help with exporting logistics to get products to these new markets.

To support our agriculture industry, my government will launch a buy-back program for farmers who have limitations on their use of farmland because of the recently released Potato Wart Management plan. This will allow farmers to sell land that is restricted in use for agriculture and purchase or lease other land if they choose. My government will also work with the Atlantic Veterinary College to address the shortage of large animal veterinarians in the province, moving towards the goal of ensuring half of admissions are for those pursuing a career caring for large animals.

Just last summer, MSX was detected on PEI for the first time. This pathogen could have a devastating impact on our Island oysters—a key export for our economy. My government will continue to work with industry to explore

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options for mitigating the impact to our world-class products while testing more resilient practices and breeds of oysters to ensure the oyster fishery stays competitive.

Tourism is one of our province's biggest economic drivers, and last year was a record-breaking year for the industry in PEI. Visitors from across Canada and around the world chose PEI as their destination, supporting our local businesses and communities. My government is exploring opportunities to improve air travel options and enhance connectivity, ensuring our tourism industry continues to thrive and that our province remains well-connected within the region.

We will also bring industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and economic partners together at the PEI Business Summit this spring. This summit will provide a platform to discuss the path forward—not just for Island businesses, but for the Island as a whole—ensuring that we are fostering long-term economic success in an evolving global market.

During some of the challenging economic times in the past, some of our emerging sectors—such as biosciences and aerospace—have been some of our best success stories. My government will continue to develop these sectors, supporting them in incubating new start-ups and helping to support the growth and development of existing businesses in the sectors.

At the same time, my government will continue to develop the Clean Technology sector on Prince Edward Island, with the continued development of the Clean Tech campus in Georgetown that will be the launchpad for PEI to become a national and global leader in the cleantech space.

My government will also explore ways for Islanders to invest in local businesses right here on PEI. Now more than ever, we need to look at ways of keeping our investments local.

That is why my government will review and improve the existing Community Economic Development Business program that allows approved and registered businesses with the program to obtain equity financing in PEI and provide tax credits to those investors who purchase shares. The goal is to make it more accessible and help keep investment dollars on Prince Edward Island.

A strong economy is not just about business growth; it's about the people and organizations that make our communities stronger. That is why we are investing in the community sector by providing predictable operating funding, ensuring these organizations have the stability they need to continue delivering essential services and making a meaningful impact for Islanders.

There are also opportunities for our community sector to capitalize on becoming social enterprises and commercializing products and services. To help support this work, my government will create a social enterprise incubator that will allow non-profits and community sector organizations to explore and experiment in expanding to be social enterprises and using the profits to reinvest into their clients and their causes.

By working together, we can build a resilient, innovative, and inclusive economy that supports Island businesses, strengthens our communities, and creates new opportunities for all Islanders. While challenges remain, our government is committed to taking bold action—whether by securing fair trade opportunities, investing in key industries, or fostering new economic growth. The path forward requires collaboration, creativity, and determination, and we are ready to meet this moment. With a clear vision and a strong commitment to our people, we will ensure that Prince Edward Island remains a place of prosperity, opportunity, and success for generations to come.

Securing our Workforce

A strong economy depends on a strong workforce. Our province's economic growth in recent years has been fueled by hardworking Islanders and today we have a record number of workers contributing to our province's success. Our goal remains the same—to continue to grow the workforce, but we also will continue to foster opportunities for those in the workforce to meet their full potential.

That is why my government remains focused on creating and protecting jobs, expanding training opportunities, and breaking down barriers to workforce participation.

We will continue working with our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts to expand labour mobility, making it easier for workers with credentials in one province to work seamlessly in another.

We are also focused on creating new opportunities for Islanders to enter the workforce. Whether it is young people starting their careers, newcomers building a future here, or those re-entering the job market, we will make sure every Islander has the tools they need to succeed.

At the same time, we are investing in new upskilling and reskilling opportunities to help Islanders advance in their careers or transition into high-demand fields. By increasing access to training programs, we can ensure more Islanders gain the skills they need without having to leave the province.

We know that training and education are key to supporting our workforce, we also know that cost can be a significant barrier for many Islanders. My government will increase the George Coles Bursary and expand the Marion L. Reid Bursary to include additional occupations. We will also review other student financial support programs to make them more accessible.

Islanders deserve to see more money in their pockets. That is why my government will continue to support efforts that help workers earn more by increasing the basic personal exemption amount, quicker than anticipated, and enhancing tax credits and rebates to allow workers to keep more of their hard-earned money. At the same time, responsible increases in minimum wage will continue. A strong economy should work for everyone, and my government is committed to making life more affordable for all.

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Healthcare is changing, and transformation is critical to meeting today's needs while preparing for the demands of tomorrow.

The new Physician Services Agreement will make PEI one of the most competitive provinces for family physicians to practice recognizing family medicine as a specialty and offering among the highest pay in the country.

We are thinking differently about how we can deliver healthcare... ensuring better, faster care for Islanders.

Securing our Healthcare System

Securing our future is about more than jobs and economic growth—it's about making sure Islanders can get the care they need, when and where they need it. Healthcare is changing, and transformation is critical to meeting today's needs while preparing for the demands of tomorrow. That's why healthcare transformation is at the core of our efforts—improving access to care, modernizing how services are delivered, and ensuring a stronger, more sustainable healthcare system for the future.

Every day, more Islanders are matched with a primary care provider, the result of ongoing efforts to streamline the patient registry and strengthen primary care. In 2025 alone, 10,000 patients will be affiliated through the opening of two new patient medical homes, the expansion of existing ones, and the hiring of more primary care providers. This work will continue, with new patient medical homes coming online in the years ahead and more Islanders to be affiliated as teams grow and capacity increases across the system.

Recruitment has increased and is expected to grow even further with a newly streamlined recruitment process. The new Physician Services Agreement will make PEI one of the most competitive provinces for family physicians to practice recognizing family medicine as a specialty and offering among the highest pay in the country.

While there is still more work to do, these steps are making a real difference. More physicians are joining the system, 41 just last year, and my government continues to remain focused on recruitment of physicians to live and work right here in Prince Edward Island.

With the foundational elements in place, my government will begin to expedite affiliation for Islanders without a primary care provider. A new Access and Affiliation Committee will align government and Health PEI capacity to support affiliation opportunities, ensuring more Islanders get access to primary care as soon as possible. Work also continues to provide a new more flexible hiring process to ensure staffing needs are being addressed to support service stabilization and expansion efforts.

We are thinking differently about how we can deliver healthcare, focusing on partnerships and innovation to improve access, reduce wait times, and ensure Islanders receive high-quality care when and where they need it. My government has been very clear, these efforts are about strengthening our publicly funded healthcare system. By working together, we are ensuring better, faster care for Islanders, maximizing the expertise of healthcare professionals and making real improvements to access for Islanders.

Through key partnerships, we are already seeing results. The Cataract Outpatient Clinic has allowed us to double the number of cataract surgeries, with over 1,100 surgeries performed since it opened in December, putting us well on our way to eliminating the waitlist, while freeing up valuable operating room space for more complex procedures. This success demonstrates what is possible when we rethink how we deliver care.

My government is committed to expanding this approach to reduce surgical wait times. A key barrier to this work is the lack of available operating rooms for surgeons. To help address this, we are exploring a community-based surgical model that would provide Islanders with access to safe, high-quality services outside of our hospitals.

Islanders in need of hip and knee replacements are waiting longer than the national benchmarks, and this must change. Expanding surgical options will help reduce wait times, increase capacity, and ensure that more Islanders get the care they need sooner.

We will build on this by expanding access to gynecological procedures outside of our hospitals, ensuring that women can access the care they need when they need it, leading to better health outcomes and more efficient use of hospital resources.

Through partnerships with community-based providers, we are reducing the MRI waitlist for semi-urgent cases. This initiative has already cut wait times by three months, ensuring Islanders receive the diagnostic imaging they need sooner. By continuing to think differently, we are creating a healthcare system that works better for everyone.

Pharmacy Plus will be expanded to provide Islanders with more options for care in their communities. Pharmacists will soon be able to assess and prescribe for more common ailments, including diagnosing and prescribing for strep throat, as well as ordering lab work—giving Islanders more ways to access care and reducing pressure on other parts of the healthcare system.

Last year, we opened more hospital and long-term care beds than in years prior, increasing capacity to meet the needs of Islanders. These new beds are helping more Islanders get the care they need, reducing strain on our hospitals, and ensuring seniors can receive the right care in the right place.

My government will continue to invest in expanding the long-term care system by increasing publicly owned and operated facilities by 50 beds in addition to expanding private long-term care beds by 175. We will support private operators by piloting the integration of allied health services in these homes and establishing rural incentives for nurses and nurse practitioners to work in rural communities to ensure these homes have a sustainable staffing model.

This fall, we will reach a major milestone with the opening of the UPEI Faculty of Medicine, a partnership with Memorial University, that will train the next generation of doctors right here in Prince Edward Island. This medical school is a key part of our long-term plan to increase the number of physicians practicing in our province and improve access to primary care.

My government continues to make real progress on mental health. Last year, our government opened a dedicated emergency department for mental health and addictions—the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada. Community access clinics are now offering care without a waitlist, making it easier for Islanders to get the support they need, close to home. Construction is also moving

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forward on the new Mental Health Campus, which will strengthen mental health and addictions services across the province.

We continue to take action to grow and strengthen our healthcare workforce. In 2024, 34 internationally trained nurses graduated from the Transition to Registered Nursing in Canada program, gaining the credentials and clinical experience needed to practice here. Work continues to add more nursing seats at UPEI, with 18 new seats already in place, and to launch an LPN to RN bridging program. Beyond expanding training opportunities, we are also supporting students enrolled in eligible healthcare programs through the Marion L. Reid grant. Investing in training and retention will create a stronger, more sustainable nursing workforce now and in the years ahead.

And we are taking the same approach for internationally trained physicians. PEI was the first province to create an Associate Physician license. Now, my government will take it a step further by launching a new Practice Ready Assessment Centre, which will evaluate internationally trained physicians and provide them with the training over 14 to 18 weeks they need to transition smoothly into our healthcare system and practice as a fully licensed physician. By creating pathways for healthcare professionals, we are building a stronger workforce and improving access to care for Islanders.

Technology and innovation are expanding options for how we deliver care. Expanding virtual care options will mean Islanders can connect with healthcare providers from the comfort of their own homes. We will also explore the use of AI in healthcare, integrating new tools to support healthcare professionals, improve diagnostic accuracy, and streamline administrative tasks.

Healthcare transformation is not just about meeting today's demands—it's about strengthening our healthcare system for the future. By expanding access to care, streamlining recruitment and affiliation, and investing in innovative approaches, we are making real progress. While there is still work to do, my government remains focused on building a healthcare system that works better for Islanders.

Securing our Infrastructure & Electrical Grid

Just as we are strengthening healthcare, we must also ensure that our schools, roads, and electrical grid are ready to support a growing province.

A strong economy and strong communities depend on reliable infrastructure. My government remains committed to investing in roads, bridges, and essential services to keep our province moving and support growth from tip to tip.

Federal funding is essential to improving and modernizing Island roads. Without a firm commitment from the federal government, the provincial government faces challenges in planning and delivering the infrastructure our province needs. Our government has made record investments in roads and

other important infrastructure, but we cannot do it alone. We need a strong, willing federal partner to keep our projects moving forward.

With key funding agreements for major infrastructure projects nearing their end, my government calls on the federal government to commit to a long-term funding model that will provide the stability needed to maintain and improve our roads, bridges and other important infrastructure projects.

Delays in obtaining building permits slow down construction and drive-up costs. That is why we will be adopting AI technology to streamline the permitting process—reducing wait times, cutting red tape, and ensuring projects can move forward faster to meet the needs of our growing province.

We must also ensure that public infrastructure projects are delivered efficiently. My government will review the tendering process to identify ways to reduce delays, improve efficiency, and keep projects on schedule. By strengthening this process, we will help ensure that critical infrastructure is completed on time and on budget.

Access to strong and reliable communication services is essential in today's world. My government will continue to move forward with building new cell phone towers to eliminate dead zones, ensuring that Islanders have service no matter where they travel. We will complete the final phase of our high-speed internet expansion, bringing connectivity to the final 2,800 homes so every Islander, regardless of where they live, will have access to reliable, high-speed internet and be able to stay connected.

A stable and resilient electrical grid is critical to securing our future. As we move toward greater electrification, we must balance growth with grid stability. My government will work to strengthen on-island energy generation by expanding wind and solar power and increasing our renewable energy capacity, but also work with utilities and the regulator to support dispatchable electrical generation so that we keep pace with the growing demand for electricity.

To support these efforts, my government will introduce a Provincial Energy Strategy to guide long-term decision-making on how we generate, use and manage energy. This strategy will ensure reliability and affordability while planning for our province's future energy needs. Work is also underway to review our electricity system to help inform decisions and strengthen energy resilience for Islanders.

As we expand energy generation, we will continue to offer programs and services that support cleaner, more efficient energy use. But this will be done in a measured way, targeting investments where they are needed most,

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Addressing the housing needs of our province requires action and investment... My government will continue to build on these efforts, making further investments to meet the housing demand across our province.

My government is taking steps to address Islanders concerns, to ensure that our communities remain secure, resilient, and prepared for the challenges ahead.

supporting those who need it most, and ensuring we balance system demands with the desires of Islanders.

At the same time, we recognize the increased cost of electricity is impacting every household on Prince Edward Island. To ensure that taxpayers are represented during rate hearings and other matters brought before a regulatory body, my government will immediately start consultation on creating a position, such as a public intervenor or consumer advocate, to represent taxpayers at all future rate hearings.

Addressing the housing needs of our province requires action and investment. My government has made historical investments in housing, committing to building over 480 new social housing units, building new tiny and small homes, and accelerating the addition of over 600 units to help address the housing needs. Through our *Housing Action Plan*, we have taken important steps to increase supply, improve affordability, and strengthen housing supports. But we know there is more to do. My government will continue to build on these efforts, making further investments to meet the housing demand across our province.

We must ensure that vulnerable Islanders have access to stable housing. That is why we will be embracing the Housing First model, which prioritizes immediate access to stable housing as the foundation for long-term stability and support. By providing housing first, we can reduce reliance on emergency shelters and transitional housing, ensuring that more Islanders have a permanent place to call home. This approach not only improves outcomes for vulnerable Islanders but allows resources to be directed toward long-term solutions rather than short-term fixes.

Securing our Communities

Islanders are feeling the strain of uncertain times. From rising costs to rapid growth, there are real pressures facing our communities. But my government is taking steps to address these concerns, to ensure that our communities remain secure, resilient, and prepared for the challenges ahead.

My government is currently reviewing the Municipal Government Act, to solicit feedback from municipalities large and small, rural and urban, to provide guidance into changes that can be made to strengthen local decision-making and ensure communities can be successful and sustainable no matter their size. While that review is being completed, my government will increase funding to municipalities with an interim agreement over the next two years to provide bridge funding until the Municipal Government Act is reviewed.

To build more resilient communities, we must strengthen our municipal infrastructure and enhance public safety. My government will be establishing a Municipal Infrastructure Bank to help communities with low-interest loans to build or refurbish critical community infrastructure.

One of the greatest tests of our resilience came with post-tropical storm Fiona—one of the most devastating storms Prince Edward Island has ever faced. Fiona demonstrated the importance of preparedness, and my government is committed to learning from that experience. We will continue to strengthen our emergency response capabilities, upgrade infrastructure to better withstand severe weather, and enhance coordination with municipalities and frontline responders.

Coastal erosion is a growing challenge for our province, with extreme weather and rising sea levels putting homes, businesses, and public infrastructure at risk. My government is committed to working to stabilize our shorelines while exploring innovative ways to prevent further erosion.

Feeling safe in our homes and in our relationships remains is pivotal in the well-being of Islanders. Reducing victimization, cycles of violence, and adverse childhood experiences require both prevention and improved responses. By continuing the important work such as the new *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, the Premier's Action Committee on Family Violence, the Domestic Violence Court, and so many other initiatives undertaken by various working groups and dedicated public servants, my government will continue to work together with community and public safety partners towards shared outcomes to prevent further harms and foster healthy communities.

Keeping our citizens—particularly our youth—safe from online bullying and harassment remains a top priority. Reducing harm and improving protections will continue to be critically important for our government. My government will continue to advance the work of the Provincial Youth Cyberviolence Prevention Strategy. The strategy will include building awareness and education, and support actions to combat cyber violence to help improve the social, emotional, and psychological well-being of all Island youth.

While not all community safety issues require a police response, when they do, my government will continue to work with police agencies across the province to ensure they are operating to consistent standards and, in response to public input, will continue to foster effective and collaborative policing which is available throughout the province. To that end, my government will invest in a Joint Enforcement Team to combat illicit drug trafficking and the associated criminality and will work with willing police agencies to ensure all communities can be safer. We have all heard heartbreaking stories of the impacts of illegal drugs, and my government is taking a firm stance by investing in a dedicated unit to increase enforcement to reduce the supply that is contributing to this public health problem.

Coastal erosion is a growing challenge for our province, with extreme weather and rising sea levels putting homes, businesses, and public infrastructure at risk.

Securing our communities also means protecting our land. My government will move forward to promote openness and accountability when it comes to land ownership.

We are making sure that schools across PEI are modern, safe, and ready to meet the needs of students today and in the future.

Effective responses to crime and crime prevention require collaborative efforts that leverage the use of resources and partnerships focused on improving community safety.

Securing our communities also means protecting our land. My government will move forward to promote openness and accountability when it comes to land ownership. This will include implementing interim measures to ensure compliance with landownership laws, making legislative and regulatory changes to protect land, and, when necessary, ensuring that thorough and proper investigations are completed and made publicly available when questions arise about compliance with the Lands Protection Act. With agriculture being one of our main economic engines in our province, we will also move forward with measures to keep agricultural land for agricultural purposes in our province.

Securing our Future

Securing our future means ensuring that every Islander has the opportunity to succeed. That starts with our youngest Islanders. We continue to strengthen our early years system by expanding spaces, supporting those who want to become Early Childhood Educators, and investing in the infrastructure needed to give more families access to early learning. Quality early childhood education sets the foundation for success, and my government remains committed to making it more accessible for families across the province.

Securing our future means ensuring that every Islander has the opportunity to succeed. That starts with our youngest Islanders.

This week, we will welcome students into the new net-zero-ready Sherwood Elementary School—a milestone for our Island and a sign of what’s to come. We are building and planning for six additional new schools, expanding two more, and moving forward with a major renovation project. Through the School Revitalization Fund, we are making sure that schools across PEI are modern, safe, and ready to meet the needs of students today and in the future.

But great schools need great people. That’s why we will continue to put more frontline staff in classrooms, expand behavioural supports, and increase prep time for teachers. When our educators have supports and time to plan, students get better learning experiences.

Supporting children and families goes beyond the classroom. My government will continue to support the School Food Program and the Children’s Summer Food Program, ensuring no child goes hungry at school or over the summer months.

The Eye See...Eye Learn program will expand to include students in grades one through six, building on the existing support for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children. It will cover annual eye exams and up to three pairs of corrective lenses and frames. This expansion will help more young Islanders see clearly—at school, at play, and in their day-to-day lives.

My government will also launch a youth engagement initiative to gather feedback and input from youth across the province, as individuals or as members of an organization. This will ensure that their voices are heard by decision-makers and that policies and programs are reflective of the needs of our future leaders.

Supporting our seniors and providing them with access to the tools and programs to help them live a fulfilling life will continue to be a priority for my government. We also know that living at home is best for those who are aging. My government will continue to broaden home care services and expand access to programs such as the Seniors Independence Initiative, Seniors Safe at Home, and the At Home Caregiver Grant.

Securing our future also means working in partnership with Lennox Island and Abegweit First Nations to support economic prosperity in their communities. My government is committed to building stronger relationships, fostering economic development, and ensuring First Nations leaders have a voice in shaping the path forward.

Conclusion

Securing our future is not just a goal—it is our responsibility. It means ensuring that Islanders have the support, the services, and the opportunities they need to build a good life here in our province. It means standing up for our industries, strengthening our communities, and preparing for the challenges ahead with confidence.

The work ahead will take focus, determination, and a clear vision for the road forward. Prince Edward Island has always been shaped by the determination and resilience of its people. Islanders face challenges head-on and do what it takes to move forward. My government will do the same.

Together, we will secure our future.

Thank you. Merci. Wela'lin.

Supporting our seniors and providing them with access to the tools and programs to help them live a fulfilling life will continue to be a priority for my government.