



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC
Lieutenant Governor

at the

Opening of the Fourth Session,
Forty-first Parliament

of the

Province of British Columbia

February 12, 2019

We are gathered on the territory of the Lekwungen speaking peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

At the opening of this fourth session of the forty-first Parliament, we bid farewell to some remarkable British Columbians:

We mourn the 1,489 friends, neighbours, and loved ones lost to overdoses in 2018. We are grateful to the community workers, first responders, health-care professionals and peers who are working together to respond to this emergency and comfort those who are coping with tremendous loss.

We stand in solidarity with the Women's Memorial March, and remember the hundreds of women who died, are missing or were murdered in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, many of them Indigenous. And tomorrow, Moose Hide gatherings throughout British Columbia will see men and women pledge to end violence against women and children.

We are at a critical moment in history in the struggle for gender equality. Your government is joining people around the world who are raising their voices, telling their stories, and fighting to end gender-based violence.

We respectfully remember Hereditary Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt Nation.

We remember with affection former Members of this Legislature including Bill Goodacre, Ray Parkinson, Barrie Clark and Jim Nielsen.

We mark the passing of Tahsis Mayor Jude Schooner, former Port McNeill Mayor Gerry Furney, Duncan councillor John Horgan, Metchosin councillor Moralea Milne, and Vernon councillor Bob Spiers.

We thank the loyal public servants who served us ably, including curator emeritus Dr. Daniel Gallacher, former chief electoral officer Robert Allan Patterson, forester John Russell, and the 31 active members of the BC Public Service we lost last year.

We remember retired Sergeant Shinder Kirk of the Abbotsford Police Department, whose 30 years of service in policing was dedicated to fighting gang violence and keeping communities safe.

We pay tribute to Constable Ian Jordan of the Victoria Police Department, who lapsed into a coma after a car accident in September 1987. Ian's life exemplified the sacrifice of service and the blessings of family, who spent every day by his side.

We express our gratitude to Suman Virk, mother of Reena Virk, who transformed the unimaginable pain of losing a child into a positive force to end bullying.

We thank the journalists who informed us and raised our spirits: John Ashbridge, Arthur Black, Angelo Iacobucci, Barb McLintock, Terry Moore and Jim Taylor.

We celebrate leaders in sport, arts and culture: Brian Hughes, Larry Kwong, David Chuenyan Lai and Ken Pickering.

Entrepreneurs and business leaders who believed in giving back: Charles Diamond, Kazuko Komatsu, and Ken Martin.

And Indigenous Elders, leaders, and community members: Henry Alfred, Linda Bristol, Harry Chingee, Larry Derrickson, Mary Gouchie, Dr. Deborah Jacobs, Justa Monk, Daniel Watts, John Webster, and Dr. Ellen White.

MAKING LIFE BETTER FOR PEOPLE

Too many British Columbians feel that no matter how hard they work, they can't get ahead. Today and every day, your government is working hard to make life better.

The problems facing British Columbians today are hurting people and leaving communities behind. Government is making choices to change this.

Instead of letting costs rise uncontrolled, your government is making life more affordable.

Instead of leaving communities to fend for themselves, your government is improving the services they count on.

Instead of focusing on some, your government is opening doors for everyone.

Making life better for people starts with the choices we make every day. This government is putting people first.

A belief in people is at the core of the Confidence and Supply Agreement, negotiated with the BC Green Party caucus, which provides strong and stable government for British Columbia. This agreement, rooted in shared priorities and shared values, has allowed government to make progress on the things that matter most.

MORE AFFORDABLE

Affordability remains the biggest challenge facing B.C. families. Many people are working two or three jobs, commuting farther for work, and spending less time with their families, just to make ends meet. But no matter how hard they work, they cannot seem to get ahead. Rather than letting costs rise uncontrolled, government is doing everything it can to make life more affordable for families.

REDUCING COSTS AND FEES

Last year, government cut MSP premiums in half, saving people up to \$450 a year and families up to \$900 a year. This year, B.C. will eliminate MSP premiums entirely, saving families up to \$1,800 a year. This is the largest middle-class tax cut British Columbians have received in a generation.

Last year, government froze ferry fares on major routes, reduced fares on non-major routes, and brought back the 100% weekday seniors' passenger fare discount. This year, government will maintain its freeze on ferry fares for major routes, and discounts on minor and northern routes, helping the 22 million passengers who use BC Ferries each year.

For too long, hundreds of millions of dollars were taken out of BC Hydro, while customers were stuck paying higher rates. Government is nearing completion of its phase one review of BC Hydro and will be taking steps to protect ratepayers and ensure proper oversight as the corporation provides affordable, clean and reliable power for generations to come.

B.C. is a wealthy province, yet more than half a million British Columbians are living below the poverty line. This year, B.C. will deliver its first-ever poverty reduction strategy, to give people the opportunities and supports they need to reach their full potential.

B.C. students are struggling with the costs of a higher education. To help ease the pressure, this government reduced the student loan interest rate by 2.5% in 2017. Budget 2019 will help make life a little easier for B.C. students.

HOUSING FOR PEOPLE

Every person in this province deserves a place to call home. Yet, years of inaction on the B.C. housing crisis have left people unable to find affordable housing. Too

many families face the impossible choice between a home that meets their needs, paying for child care, or buying groceries for their family.

Last year, government made the biggest investment in housing in B.C. history: \$7 billion over 10 years. Government's plan to build supply, curb speculation, and improve security for renters is starting to get results.

More than 17,000 homes are underway through government's housing initiatives, including on-campus homes for students, Indigenous housing on and off-reserve, housing for women and children leaving domestic violence, and affordable rentals for middle-income families.

In Surrey, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Vancouver, Maple Ridge and many other communities, hundreds of people who were without a home, or were living in tents and temporary shelters, are living in new modular homes.

Government's actions are cooling B.C.'s housing market and helping people. Foreign and domestic speculation has dropped, and home prices in the Lower Mainland are beginning to moderate. Vacancy rates for rentals are forecast to rise, and government intervened to limit rent increases.

This year, government will take further steps to improve rental housing by addressing the recommendations of the Rental Housing Task Force.

Your government will improve the development process by speeding up much-needed rental housing and delivering more efficient and effective project approvals.

And your government will continue to work with partners to build the homes people need, improving housing affordability for young families, renters, seniors and everyone who calls B.C. home.

British Columbians are rightly outraged by the possibility that our province's unacceptably high housing prices are fuelled by the profits of crime, both at home and abroad.

This government has worked quickly to address money laundering in B.C. casinos. Two independent reviews are underway examining the role of money laundering in B.C. real estate. Their recommendations will provide the basis for immediate action to close loopholes and defend against criminal activity.

Your government will identify the structural causes of money laundering to hold accountable those who are responsible. And your government will keep working with its federal partners to fight money laundering in all its forms.

KEEPING ICBC AFFORDABLE

Automobile insurance costs continue to impose a heavy burden on family budgets. Years of apparent inaction and neglect, combined with large annual transfers of financial resources from ICBC to government, created a financial crisis at the Crown corporation.

Your government has undertaken the most significant reforms to car insurance in a generation. There are new laws, new systems and a new independent tribunal to resolve insurance disputes. British Columbians will start to see the benefits as these reforms take effect April 1.

Government believes these reforms will achieve the outcomes British Columbians deserve: affordable car insurance, safer roads and a public insurer that isn't losing money. However, it must be prepared to take further action to keep rates low.

Your government will continue to consider measures to improve the province's auto insurance system, informed by the experience in other provinces and jurisdictions, coupled with ongoing evaluation of reforms implemented to date. If further action is required, your government will be ready.

British Columbians are entitled to universally available, high-quality public auto insurance coverage at the lowest possible cost. Your government is determined to deliver.

QUALITY CHILD CARE FOR FAMILIES

Last year, government took its first steps to make quality child care more affordable and available to more B.C. families. A \$1 billion dollar investment over three years – the most significant child care investment in B.C. history – will reduce child care costs, increase the number of spaces and deliver the highest quality care.

Tens of thousands of B.C. families are already enjoying the benefits. With child-care costs reduced by hundreds of dollars a month, young families can consider home ownership for the first time. More parents can participate fully in the workforce, confident their children are getting high-quality care from early childhood educators who know their work is valued.

This year, government will set the foundation for the full implementation of B.C.'s affordable child care program. A key element of this effort will be a collaborative process to develop new legislation to give universal access to quality, affordable childcare the force of law.

STRONGER CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

High cellphone costs are a major burden for middle-class families. Canadians pay some of the highest fees for phones and data in the world. Consumers deserve to know the true costs of the services they buy. This year, your government will take action to improve billing transparency, beginning with a consultation and legislative review. Your government will give consumers the tools they need to get the least expensive possible service and encourage the federal government to deliver more affordable cellphone options for people.

When it's impossible to make ends meet, some families need short-term loans. Building on reforms introduced last year, government will take further steps to crack down on unfair payday loan practices. New legislation will cap fees for cashing government cheques, provide oversight for installment loans and improve consumer education.

Last year, government heard from thousands of British Columbians about the unfair sale and re-sale of concert and event tickets. People are frustrated that companies can buy up large numbers of tickets and re-sell them at sky-high prices. This year, government will introduce new rules for live ticket sales, including a ban on mass ticket-buying software, and more transparency for all companies selling tickets to live events.

BETTER SERVICES

Quality public services are the key to stronger, healthier communities. Your government is investing in public services to make sure they are accessible, reliable and affordable for everyone.

EDUCATION

After years of underfunding, your government is making record investments in education, with more support and better learning environments for students.

Your government has invested more than \$900 million to build, expand, and upgrade schools, and purchase land for future schools in growing communities. Since September 2017, B.C. has approved 24 seismic upgrade projects, with one-third of all projects completed or underway.

Many students in B.C. are enjoying smaller class sizes, with the hiring of 3,700 new teachers, including special education teachers, teacher psychologists and counsellors.

Government is supporting Indigenous learners by implementing a new First Nations history curriculum and developing full-course offerings in Indigenous languages.

And government is making sure schools are welcoming and inclusive by expanding anti-bullying programs and making sure all school districts have resources for mental health and wellness, and sexual orientation and gender identity.

HEALTH CARE

Public health care is a right, yet too many British Columbians can't find a family doctor and are waiting too long for care. Your government is making different choices and getting health care working for people again.

Last year, government cut or eliminated Fair PharmaCare deductibles for 240,000 people, so they no longer have to choose between food and medicine.

To deliver better, faster care for people in all corners of the province, government has opened a network of urgent primary care centres. These new centres will come with 200 more family practice physicians, 200 nurse practitioners and 50 clinical pharmacists and other health-care providers.

Government is investing in health care across the board, including building, renovating and expanding hospitals in Terrace, Fort St. James, Surrey, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Richmond, North Vancouver, the Cowichan Valley and many other communities.

To make sure seniors are getting the quality care they need and deserve, government is increasing staffing levels in residential care homes.

And your government has added thousands more surgeries and MRI exams throughout the province, so people can get the procedures they need faster and closer to home.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

The overdose emergency is the worst public-health crisis in our province's history. By the end of this day, four people in B.C. will have died from a poisoned, illegal drug supply.

It is difficult, and it is heartbreaking. But there is also hope. Your government is working to save lives by expanding harm reduction, increasing access to Naloxone, addressing the unsafe drug supply, and connecting people to life-saving supports, including treatment and recovery. More resources have been allocated to law enforcement to control the criminal elements fuelling this crisis.

We must not lose sight of services for people living with mental illness, particularly young people. Your government is creating an integrated, province-wide network of health and social services for youth, including Foundry wellness centres.

These vital services are all part of B.C.'s actions to help people living with mental health and addictions challenges, where every door is the right door on the path to recovery and healing.

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

British Columbia is a remarkable place filled with unmatched natural beauty and resources, hardworking people, and a thriving economy.

For too long, choices were made to benefit only the wealthy few. Your government is taking a different approach and building a prosperous economy that works for everyone.

This government is making different choices so that people can afford to live and work here, with action on affordable housing, lower costs and fees, and affordable child care for B.C. families. These investments are good for people, and good for business.

This government is investing skills training, to better meet demands of our labour market.

And this government is rising to the challenges of climate change, to protect this beautiful province and create a strong and sustainable future.

CLEANBC

In a world where climate action is increasingly recognized as an emergency, demand is growing for low-carbon products and energy to reduce emissions.

The same ideas and technology that fight carbon pollution and improve our quality of life can drive economic growth and attract investment.

CleanBC is this government's roadmap to reduce emissions and create an innovative, low-carbon economy.

Created in partnership with the BC Green Party Caucus, the CleanBC plan will change how British Columbians get around, with a focus on clean-energy vehicles, lower emissions, cleaner fuels and active transportation.

By moving to clean, renewable energy – like our abundant supply of hydroelectricity – we will power our growing economy.

CleanBC will improve where we live and work, through building retrofits and new net-zero energy standards for new buildings.

It will promote industrial electrification and carbon capture and invite new and existing industries to deliver cleaner operations.

Most importantly, it will create jobs and opportunity for people, businesses and communities.

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time. We can and must reduce our emissions, but government can't do it alone. First Nations governments, communities and businesses are all partners on the path forward.

Your government will bring forward measures for the implementation of CleanBC in Budget 2019.

LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

Last year, this government was proud to announce the largest private-sector investment in Canadian history.

Enabled by government's new financial framework, LNG Canada's liquefied natural gas project will create 10,000 construction jobs and 950 permanent jobs for B.C. The project will generate \$23 billion in government revenue that will be reinvested in the schools, roads, hospitals, housing and services that families depend on.

This project can proceed because government's four conditions were met: a fair rate of return for our natural resources; job opportunities and training for people in B.C.; meaningful partnerships with First Nations; and, critically, the project fits within government's CleanBC plan.

The benefits of this investment will require your government's full commitment for many years. A continued focus on reconciliation with First Nations, particularly those on whose territory the project will be built, is critical to success.

This spring, your government will bring forward measures to bring this historic project to fruition.

RECONCILIATION

This government is committed to true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Last year, government and First Nations agreed to share in provincial gaming revenue to support self-government, strong, healthy communities and services for families. This stable, long-term revenue will make a substantial difference for people and communities.

This year, government has begun working with First Nations to make sure they are full participants in decision-making that affect their rights and lands. B.C. will be the first province in Canada to introduce legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, legislation co-developed with the First Nations Leadership Council and other Indigenous organizations.

This legislation will form the foundation for the Province's work on reconciliation, mandating government to bring provincial laws and policies into harmony with the Declaration.

JOBS IN EVERY COMMUNITY

British Columbia's traditional industries – forestry and mining, oil and gas, fisheries and farming, and renewable electricity – power our economy and form the bedrock of our communities. This government is managing the province's natural resource economy and making it work for British Columbians, by increasing local processing, promoting Indigenous partnerships, and creating jobs and opportunity for local workers and rural communities.

Forestry employs 57,000 British Columbians and supports over 7,000 businesses throughout B.C. In January, government announced the Coast Forest Sector Revitalization Initiative as part of government's work to rebuild a strong and healthy coastal forest sector. These reforms will reduce raw log exports and see more logs and fibre processed in B.C., supporting B.C. workers, their families and communities.

After two consecutive years of record-breaking and difficult wildfires, government is standing with communities as they rebuild and recover. Government has contributed over \$100 million through the Canadian Red Cross to help people and communities. And your government has invested \$50 million in wildfire prevention over the next three years to help local governments and First Nations reduce wildfire risks in and around their communities.

B.C. is a mining province, with mining and mineral exploration adding more than \$8 billion to the economy each year. Last year, your government created the Mining Jobs Task Force to make sure B.C. remains an attractive and secure place to invest. This year, government is acting on their recommendations, including improved oversight, more support for innovation in mining and mineral exploration, and promoting Indigenous partnerships.

Wild salmon are critical to the success of B.C.'s economy, the prosperity of coastal communities, and to the lives, culture and history of Indigenous peoples. Governments, communities and First Nations are charting a path forward to protect and restore wild salmon stocks, implement a transition plan for salmon aquaculture in the Broughton Archipelago, and create a more sustainable future for local communities and workers.

The Premier's Wild Salmon Advisory Council was convened last year, bringing together experts from around the province to develop a strategy for restoring and sustaining B.C.'s salmon populations.

Agriculture is an important part of B.C.'s economy. Government is working to protect farmland and developing new markets for B.C. agricultural products. To maximize the benefits of B.C.'s rich agricultural land, your government will launch a food security task force to consider how B.C. can harness new technologies and innovation to produce more food, jobs and prosperity, while reducing waste.

British Columbia has one of the largest park systems in the world. Last year, government purchased ecologically-sensitive land on Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, in the Okanagan and in the Kootenays. This year, government

will designate these lands as Class A parks, to make sure everyone can enjoy these beautiful natural spaces for years to come.

The tourism sector supports over 133,000 jobs in British Columbia. Government is working to attract visitors from around the world, while supporting the arts, sport and cultural projects. Government will modernize the Royal BC Museum, to protect its historic holdings and provide better access to its collections. Government will also establish a new Chinese Canadian Museum, to honour the community's significant contributions to our province.

INNOVATION IN EVERY SECTOR

Your government recognizes the incredible potential for B.C. to be a global hub of connectivity and innovation.

Borders that are open to trade and immigration also create opportunities for people. B.C. is partnering with the State of Washington to grow the region's innovation and tech economy, fight climate change, promote trade and improve transportation connectivity.

Your government is exploring the feasibility of an ultra-high-speed corridor connecting B.C., Washington and Oregon, an initiative that holds great promise for the Lower Mainland.

Connectivity opens doors to new opportunities for every person in B.C. Our government is helping connect people in rural or remote communities through high-speed internet. People in 190 rural and remote communities, including 69 Indigenous communities, will soon have more bandwidth to run their business, access public services and connect to the world.

When we support connectivity and growth in tech and innovation, we are encouraging growth in every part of the economy.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND MOBILITY

Infrastructure and mobility are critical to our economy and the livability of our communities. Rather than pick winners and losers or divide people, this government is ready to collaborate and support local governments to get people and goods moving.

Government is investing in infrastructure projects throughout B.C., including schools, roads, and transit improvements, which will create tens of thousands of jobs for people.

To create good-paying jobs, better training and apprenticeships, and more trades opportunities for Indigenous people, women and youth around the province, this government established Community Benefit Agreements for major infrastructure projects. These agreements make sure that public investments create public benefits and strengthen local economies.

This year, ride hailing will enter the market, giving passengers options and flexibility, while making sure people are safe.

From the Lower Mainland, to southern Vancouver Island, the Fraser Valley and our Coast, the Interior, Okanagan, Kootenays and the North, your government will work with local partners to deliver transportation and mobility options that work for people.

TRUST IN OUR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

The strength of this Legislature does not come from stone, slate, marble or granite. It comes from a foundation of public trust.

That trust was recently shaken.

This government values transparency and takes very seriously its responsibility to maintain the integrity of our public institutions.

Your government will work with this Assembly to implement reforms that restore trust in this core institution, so that our democracy is stronger going forward.

MAKING LIFE BETTER

This government believes in British Columbians. Their determined spirit, innovative potential, and ingenuity fuels this government's resolve to build a better B.C., where we rise to the challenges of today to secure the opportunities of tomorrow.

Government is making different choices to make life better, so that B.C.'s bright future and unlimited potential is shared with everyone, not just the few.

The road ahead will not be easy. We will get there with open dialogue, open hearts, and an understanding that making life better can only happen when all of us make progress together.

As you embark on this new legislative session, let every Member of this House be inspired by the hope and optimism of British Columbians, whose lives are getting better each day.