



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Her Honour the Honourable Janet Austin, OBC

Lieutenant Governor

at the Opening of the

Fifth Session, Forty-first Parliament

of the

Province of British Columbia

February 11, 2020

We begin by acknowledging the Lekwungen peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, upon whose traditional territories we are gathered today.

As we open the fifth session of the 41st Parliament, we pause to remember the British Columbians we have lost in the past year.

At least 57 Canadians perished on Ukrainian International Airlines Flight 752 in Iran on January 8. Fifteen of them called B.C. home. Our thoughts are with their families and the Iranian-Canadian community, who are coping with tremendous loss.

We recognize appointed and elected officials who served British Columbians and this Legislature: Conflict of Interest Commissioner Paul Fraser, QC; the Honourable Ted Hughes; former MLAs Gillian Trumper and Norman Jacobsen.

We thank those who stepped forward to serve at the local level: Oak Bay Mayor Nils Jensen, and Vancouver councillors May Brown and B.C. Lee.

We honour the public servants who passed away this year, including forester Peter Fuglem, BC Parks employee Micah Messent, BC Mail employee Martin Payne, and conservationist Al Martin.

We are grateful to the people who shaped B.C. arts and culture: writer Wayson Choy, actor Godfrey Gao, singer John Mann, Coast Salish artist Gus Modeste, and painter Gordon Smith.

We recognize leaders in sport: Soccer player Brandon Bassi, mountain biker Jordie Lunn, and basketball player and Olympian Eli Pasquale.

And Indigenous leaders and Elders: Former shíshálh Chief Stan Dixon, Dr. Frank William Maloway, Oscar Mercer, and George Saddleman.

These British Columbians inspired us with their achievements and honoured us with their friendship.

We are grateful to have known them.



British Columbia is a province with limitless potential.

But for a long time, many people have been feeling stuck.

The benefits of B.C.'s economy were not fairly shared.

Tax breaks went to the people at the top, while life became more expensive for everyone else.

At the same time, improvements to health care were delayed.

Schools were closed or overcrowded.

Wages didn't grow.

And opportunity seemed increasingly out of reach.

For many British Columbians, their future in this province was in question.

Young people weren't sure they could stay in the communities where they grew up.

Families wondered how long they could hang on.

And too many people felt that no matter how hard they worked, they were falling behind.

Two and a half years ago, government set out to change this.

Supported by the Confidence and Supply Agreement with the BC Green Party Caucus, this government started making different choices.

It started putting people first again.

In its first 100 days, government took big money out of politics, toughened lobbying rules, and set the terms for a referendum on electoral reform.

In the first 100 days, government raised taxes on the top 2% and used the revenues to fund the schools, hospitals and public services people needed.

In the first 100 days, government raised the minimum wage, removed unfair bridge tolls, lifted income assistance and disability rates, and reduced interest on student loans.

And in the first 100 days, government eliminated fees for Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning, and made post-secondary education for former kids-in-care tuition free.

In its first year, government rolled up its sleeves and took on the bigger problems – problems that were years in the making.

This government brought forward a housing plan to increase supply, curb demand, and crack down on speculation and fraud.

And a universal child care plan, to provide affordable, quality care to every family that needs it.

In its first year, government got to work on a climate action plan to reduce emissions and create jobs and opportunities for people.

And in its first year, government took the first steps toward meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Government did all of these things because British Columbians deserve security, stability, and opportunity.

They deserve to be confident in their future.

To get there, people deserve a government that works as hard as they do.

A government that shares their priorities and is working to make life better.

After two and a half years, your government's choices are leading to progress for people.

As British Columbians greet this new day, and a new decade, they are starting to move forward.

PROGRESS FOR PEOPLE

Today, more British Columbians are waking up with a safe and secure roof over their heads.

Thousands of people who were homeless now have supportive housing and the chance at a fresh start.

Renters have more rights and protections, and annual rent increases have been held down to the rate of inflation.

Empty homes are turning into housing for people.

Today, when British Columbians check their mail, they are relieved to no longer receive an MSP bill, because government has eliminated this tax.

Starting in October, they can expect a new piece of mail, with a Child Opportunity Benefit for families that need it most.

And when they review their bank statements, many families have more money left at the end of the month than they did three years ago.

As British Columbians open their front door, they can see progress taking root.

New child care spaces are opening in their neighbourhoods.

This government has funded more than 10,000 new spaces throughout the province.

As the morning school bell rings, thousands of B.C. parents are dropping off their children at new and safe schools.

Students are learning in the smallest average class sizes in a generation, and they are succeeding at an unprecedented rate.

With the support of B.C.'s dedicated and professional teachers and support staff, nearly 90% of B.C. students are completing secondary school, including almost 70% of Indigenous students, the highest rate in B.C. history.

As they commute to school and work, British Columbians have more ways to get around.

There are more buses, SkyTrain cars, rapid transit, and active transportation options than ever before.

More drivers are choosing electric vehicles and taking advantage of government rebates that make clean options more affordable.

On their commutes, British Columbians pass by building sites for new and upgraded hospitals.

In less than three years, this government has moved forward on 13 hospital projects.

In these facilities, there are more surgeries and diagnostic tests for waiting patients.

And thanks to the FeedBC program, more people in our hospitals are eating healthy, nutritious, local B.C. food.

As they move through their communities, British Columbians will notice infrastructure projects underway, like the Pattullo Bridge replacement, the Highway 1 expansion, and the final phase of the Kicking Horse Canyon project.

These projects are being built with Community Benefit Agreements, which provide good jobs for local people and apprenticeship opportunities for women, Indigenous peoples and groups under-represented in the trades.

Today, British Columbians live in a province that provides better support for the most vulnerable.

B.C. has a homelessness action plan, and a strategy to lift people and families out of poverty.

There is a pathway to hope for mental health, with more supports for children, youth and families to set them up for a lifetime of health and wellness.

With changes to child welfare rules, government is helping more families stay together.

B.C. has the lowest number of children and youth in care in 30 years.

And more youth from care than ever before are getting educational, cost of living, and other supports through Agreements with Young Adults.

Today, British Columbians have more opportunities to participate in recreation, sport, arts and culture.

With more funding for the BC Arts Council, artists and creators have more support to inspire others.

In the future, people will be able to visit renewed cultural institutions, like the Royal BC Museum and the Vancouver Art Gallery, as well as a new Chinese Canadian museum.

Today, British Columbians are more connected, to their communities and each other.

Coastal communities have had ferry service restored, and fares have been frozen or reduced.

Thousands more families in remote, rural, and Indigenous communities have high-speed internet, creating opportunities for business and economic growth.

BC Bus North is giving people a safe, affordable option to get around northern regions of the province.

And despite global headwinds, British Columbians are enjoying the benefits of a strong and resilient economy.

Wages have gone up.

Unemployment is the lowest in Canada, and has been for two years running.

B.C. leads the country in economic growth.

All the while, this government has delivered balanced budgets, and maintained B.C.'s triple-A credit rating.



At home, in our communities, and throughout our province, people are starting to make progress.

They are more able to face the challenges ahead, because they know they aren't alone.

They have a government that is a partner in their future.

It's been two and a half years, but the hard work has only just begun.

MAKING LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE

Years of rising costs, and no relief, left many people falling behind.

This government has done a lot to help families save money.

But costs are still too high, and British Columbians deserve the chance to get ahead.

This government is working hard to make everyday life a little easier.

MORE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE

Government has been working hard to fix the housing crisis.

For too long, speculators treated B.C. real estate like a stock market, and criminals used it as a place to store dirty money.

This government's speculation and vacancy tax is turning empty homes into housing.

And a public inquiry into money laundering will make sure B.C.'s economy is working for people, not organized crime.

This government is building housing for people of all incomes, from people experiencing homelessness to middle-income families.

Every week, new projects are being funded, builders are breaking ground, and people are moving into safe and secure homes.

Non-profit partnerships, government-funded, and private-sector projects are creating tens of thousands of new, affordable homes for people of all ages and stages of life.

All told, this government's plan will see 114,000 new homes built over 10 years.

As this work continues, government is taking additional steps to make sure every British Columbian has a safe, affordable home.

This government is working with municipalities to speed up approvals and encourage them to make full use of rental zoning.

And this year, government will act on the recommendations of the Rental Housing Task Force, to provide more security for renters, and relieve them of the burden of fighting unfair or illegal renovictions on their own.

CLEANING UP ICBC

While housing is every family's first affordability challenge, car insurance is a close second.

B.C. drivers are simply paying too much.

Premiums soared after years of mismanagement and neglect that saw hundreds of millions taken out of ICBC.

By 2017, the corporation was nearly insolvent and racking up billion-dollar deficits.

Last year, this government introduced major reforms to get ICBC out of the red.

These first steps have been effective.

The corporation is on more stable fiscal footing, and there will be no increase to basic rates this year.

But insurance rates are still far too expensive.

That is why this government is transforming ICBC.

It is taking costly legal fees out of the system, and giving people enhanced coverage for medical care.

Next year, when drivers renew, they can expect insurance rates to go down by an average of 20%.

Lower rates, the care you need, and more fairness and accountability.

That's what a better ICBC is all about.

FAIR PRICING FOR CONSUMERS

This government is taking steps to stop big companies from gouging consumers.

Legislation passed last year will give B.C. drivers more information about how companies set gasoline prices.

This spring, new rules for live-event ticket sales will come into force, stopping ticket bots in their tracks and making costs more transparent.

And later this month, B.C. government representatives will travel to Ottawa to fight for more affordable cellphone plan options and transparency in billing.

LIFTING UP WAGES

A life that's more affordable is one where people earn a fair wage.

In June 2020, B.C.'s minimum wage will go up to \$14.60 an hour.

By 2021, it will reach \$15.20 an hour, fulfilling this government's commitment to B.C.'s lowest-paid workers.

This year, government will once again lift earnings exemptions for people on disability and income assistance, allowing people to earn more money and support them in re-entering the workforce.

Last year, this government passed legislation giving workers fleeing domestic violence up to 10 days of unpaid job-protected leave.

This year, B.C. is taking the next step and providing these workers with paid leave, for up to five days.

And this spring, government will take steps to provide more support to workers who have suffered job-related sickness or injury.

CREATING AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

Two years ago, this government put B.C. on the path to universal child care.

Tens of thousands of families are already feeling the benefits.

Fee reductions and the affordable child care benefit have put more money back in families' pockets.

And parents are bringing their skills back into the workforce, benefiting local business and the economy.

There is more work to do to help British Columbians find quality child care they can afford.

Government continues to train more Early Childhood Educators, to make sure B.C. has the professional, caring and skilled child care workers it needs.

Those Early Childhood Educators are now earning higher wages, with an additional \$1-per-hour increase coming April 1 for those working in licensed care.

As work on universal child care continues, this government will work to increase the number of spaces for school-aged children, and partner with school districts to create more before- and after-school care.

BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES

Years of minimal increases to public services left communities frustrated, and people without the supports they needed.

Those years represent a lost opportunity for people, businesses and economic growth.

This government is working hard to restore public services and make opportunities available to everyone.

INVESTING IN EDUCATION

This government is speeding up investments in quality public education.

Since July 2017, this government has funded more than 80 school capital projects, each one representing a newer, better, or safer school for B.C. students.

In the coming year, British Columbians will see even more seismic upgrades, school replacements, and land purchases for future schools.

Instead of falling behind, school districts are now looking ahead, and planning for new schools in growing communities.

Inside these new schools, students have more learning support, with 4,200 new teachers, almost 2,000 new education assistants, 700 new special education teachers, and nearly 200 teacher-psychologists and counsellors.

Their professional, skilled, and caring support is crucial to student success.

Teachers, parents, and school trustees have long advocated for better supports for B.C. students that need it most.

This year, for the first time, children and youth in care will be recognized with a new funding supplement.

And government will expand priority funding to children with mental-health challenges, and children from low-income families.

This means that schools can provide more supports like trauma counselling, school breakfast or lunch programs, tutoring, and mentoring.

And government will continue to provide dedicated funding supports for Indigenous learners.

OPENING DOORS TO POST-SECONDARY

When people have the opportunity to learn a new skill or trade, it benefits them, their families, and our province as a whole.

More than 1,100 former youth in care are getting a post-secondary education tuition-free.

And more than 20,000 people have upgraded their skills in tuition-free Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning.

Hundreds of new training spaces in computer science, technology, engineering, and the skilled trades are helping people hone their skills and find a job that fits.

And more funding for employment programs, co-ops and work-integrated learning opportunities are helping young people get a better start.

This government's work to open the doors of opportunity to students and people continuing their learning isn't done.

Budget 2019 eliminated interest on all B.C. student loans, and Budget 2020 will help people starting post-secondary, skills training and certificate programs.

BETTER HEALTH CARE

This government is making big investments in public health care, and with it, the health of every British Columbian.

Since July 2017, this government has moved forward on 13 hospital projects, and opened 12 urgent and primary care centres.

Five hip and knee replacement programs are up and running, with 14 more on the way.

In the first year of its diagnostic strategy, government exceeded its targets for MRI exams, with nearly 44,000 more performed throughout B.C. compared to 2017-18.

By purchasing more MRI machines, and running existing ones longer, B.C. has improved wait times in all regions.

This year, B.C. will complete even more, giving people the diagnostic care they've been waiting for.

This government is also making sure our elderly get the dignified care they deserve.

Last year, B.C. added funding for more than one million hours of direct care for seniors in long-term care homes.

As a result, B.C. has now doubled the number of facilities that meet or exceed the target of 3.36 hours of direct care per resident day.

And the number of long-term care homes that provided fewer than 2.9 hours per resident day has dropped from 75 to four.

None of this would be possible without the skilled and dedicated health-care professionals that care for people every day.

This government is doing everything it can to recruit more doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, and other health-care professionals.

Government is opening up training seats for health-care assistants, specialty nurses, and health-care specialist positions.

And government is treating workers fairly, by honouring collective agreements and protecting successorship rights.

Your government will keep working hard to deliver faster, better health care for people, closer to home.

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH

People in B.C. expect an urgent and comprehensive response to the overdose crisis – one that includes prevention, enforcement, harm reduction, and treatment and recovery.

This government's efforts are making a difference.

Since the crisis began, at least 4,700 deaths have been averted, thanks to expanded harm reduction and treatment options.

Your government is working hard to create a seamless system of mental health and addictions care, where no one gets left behind.

The Pathway to Hope mental health roadmap includes early intervention and prevention for children and youth, in schools, homes and communities.

Youth and their families can access wraparound care at community Foundry centres, with eight already open and 11 on the way.

More people in B.C. can access low- or no-cost programs for mental health and addictions challenges.

And more Indigenous communities are planning, designing and delivering services based on their own mental health priorities.

SAFER COMMUNITIES

British Columbians deserve to feel safe in the communities they call home.

This government is acting to fight crime and gangs.

Government has expanded education and prevention programs, to help stop kids from entering gang life.

This spring, new legislation will give police more tools to block the use of illegal firearms and ban guns from schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals.

For years, policing resources have not kept up with growth in rural B.C.

This year, government will increase support to police services and First Nations policing for rural communities.

A MORE INCLUSIVE PROVINCE

Feeling safe in your community is also about having a place in your community.

At a time when hate and intolerance is on the rise, this government is working to keep people safe and protect the diversity that makes B.C. strong.

The lived experience of women, people of colour, gender-diverse people, and people with disabilities tells us we have more work to do to build a more inclusive province.

That's why this government renewed the human rights commission, and created a provincewide anti-racism network to combat hate and prejudice.

It's why this government pursues gender equity, and increased funding to organizations that help women and children leaving violence.

It's why this government is working with partners to make communities more accessible to people of all abilities.

It's why this government supports SOGI initiatives in B.C. schools, and the United Way Period Promise for free menstrual products in school washrooms.

Everyone has a place in this province – she, he, and they.

It is not enough to believe in these values.

Governments must act on them.

This government will continue the work to advance equality, diversity, human rights, and mutual respect.

Because a better B.C. is one where everyone is included and free to be who they are.

RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is a matter of rights, respect, and justice.

It is a journey we are on together.

And it must last for generations.

For two and a half years, this government has worked in partnership with Indigenous peoples to make progress on reconciliation.

It has made major investments in Indigenous priorities like language revitalization, funding for Aboriginal friendship centres, culturally appropriate health care and mental-health supports, and Indigenous housing on- and off-reserve.

Last year, B.C. transferred the first two years of funding, as part of a commitment that will see \$3 billion in provincial gaming revenues shared with First Nations over 25 years.

This means First Nations can invest in self-government, cultural revitalization, and services that make life better for families.

Reconciliation is rooted in the recognition of Indigenous rights as human rights.

This government committed to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Many said it could not be done.

But this government challenged the status quo.

It partnered with the First Nations Leadership Council to write a new law.

And B.C. made history when this legislature unanimously endorsed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

It was a proud moment in this province's history.

But the work has only just begun.

The next step is an action plan, which government will develop in collaboration with Indigenous peoples.

A STRONG, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

A strong economy cannot be built on a foundation of rampant real estate speculation.

It cannot be won in a race to the bottom, with minimum standards and fewer workplace protections.

And it cannot be gained through windfall profits earned on the backs of low-wage workers.

Instead, a strong economy comes from good-paying jobs that raise family incomes and everyone's standard of living.

It is built with quality public services as a cornerstone; services that help B.C. grow, attract, and keep its skilled workforce.

A strong economy is rooted in competitiveness, a necessary ingredient for success in today's global marketplace.

And it is in harmony with government's commitments to fight climate change and achieve meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

These are the values that guide this government's actions to build a sustainable economy that puts people first.

The challenges we face – from worsening weather, to global economic headwinds – make this work more urgent than ever.

As this government charts a new course to a low-carbon economy, powered by CleanBC, British Columbians can rest assured:

Not only will we weather these storms, we will create the conditions for people and industry to thrive.

INNOVATION AND CLIMATE ACTION

CleanBC is a critical part of this government's strategy to grow a sustainable economy with good jobs and opportunities for people.

It's been one year since CleanBC was launched, and British Columbians are starting to see that the way to a cleaner, better future is by innovating and working together.

People have cleaner options for getting around, heating our homes, and fuelling industry.

And more communities are investing in clean energy and green building projects.

B.C.'s world-leading clean-tech and renewable-energy industries will help our province reduce emissions and protect our clean air, water, and land.

Thanks to the Confidence and Supply Agreement, B.C.'s first Innovation Commissioner has helped advance tech and innovation, by building relationships and helping companies access talent and capital.

And the Emerging Economy Task Force will help B.C. stay at the forefront of emerging economic developments and address the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Your government is looking at ways to build on the successes of both of these initiatives.

As CleanBC enters its second year, government will bring people together to fight pollution, reduce emissions and build a sustainable, innovative, and prosperous economy.

This year, government will release a plastics action plan to reduce plastic pollution and keep it out of B.C.'s landfills and waterways.

Also this year, a climate adaptation strategy will make sure B.C. communities are ready for changes in weather and other climate impacts.

This government will work with business to promote B.C. industries as competitive suppliers of low-carbon products.

By positioning B.C. as a supplier of choice, this government will grow markets for B.C. products while reducing global emissions.

In export markets where global players have not adopted carbon pricing, B.C.'s energy-intensive industries need to stay competitive.

Government and business are partnering to support these industries, so that we can grow B.C. jobs while meeting our emission targets across all sectors.

As the only G7 nation with free-trade access to the United States, Europe and Asia Pacific, Canada – and especially British Columbia – has unique trade and investment opportunities around the world.

This government's commitment to reduce carbon emissions can be a competitive advantage throughout B.C.'s trade and investment network.

As work gets underway on the LNG Canada project – the largest private-sector investment in Canadian history – this government is seeking ways to reduce emissions overall.

Work continues on electrification initiatives to reduce emissions from B.C.'s gas fields, in partnership with the federal government.

B.C. and Washington State are partnering on a Clean Grid Initiative to use clean, affordable energy to power the region's economy.

And government is supporting development of LNG bunkering in B.C. ports, reducing greenhouse gas emissions here and everywhere LNG-powered vessels operate.

STRENGTH IN NATURAL RESOURCES

The promise of new economic opportunities extends to B.C.'s natural resources.

Mining, forestry, agriculture, and energy continue to generate good jobs for people and financial returns to government.

These industries can play a leading role in supporting innovation that helps B.C. achieve its economic, climate, and reconciliation goals.

This government's Food Security Task Force has proposed new ways to use technology to maximize B.C.'s rich agricultural land – wisely preserved nearly 50 years ago – so we can produce more food and grow new business opportunities.

From the copper needed for electric cars, to the metallurgical coal that makes wind turbines, the world needs B.C. minerals and metals.

This government is working to keep mining competitive and create good jobs, by making mineral exploration tax credits permanent and permitting more efficient.

As a generator of clean hydroelectricity, BC Hydro is helping us switch to renewable energy, in B.C. and in global markets.

And to fuel the transformation underway in forestry, this government has directed that all future public infrastructure projects be built with B.C. engineered wood wherever possible.

The transition from high volume to high value has been difficult for forest workers and their communities.

A wave of mill closures and curtailments driven by changes in global markets, reduced supply, wildfire losses and the mountain pine beetle, has left many people hurting.

It could be argued that the previous government did not take adequate steps to address the changes it well knew were coming.

This has made the current situation even more difficult for people today.

This government's first priority is helping communities that are struggling.

There are job placement and skills training opportunities for workers, bridge loans for logging contractors on the coast, and grants for hard-hit communities.

As government addresses the needs of workers and communities, it is also taking the first steps in fixing systemic issues the previous government ignored.

In the Interior, government is bringing together forest companies, workers, local governments and First Nations to find local solutions that help the industry stay competitive and maximize available resources.

And on the coast, a revitalization strategy will see fewer logs shipped offshore, and better use of waste wood.

There is no overnight fix for problems created by years of neglect.

These solutions will help forestry – a foundational B.C. industry – get back on the right track.

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

The good jobs and opportunities of a sustainable economy should be available to everyone, in every community.

This government is promoting quality economic growth that increases wages, generates revenues to fund public services, and shares the benefits of growth broadly throughout the province.

By promoting a strong, sustainable tourism sector, this government is offering visitors authentic and unforgettable experiences that drive economic growth in all regions.

By expanding high-speed internet in nearly 500 rural, remote, and Indigenous communities since July 2017, this government is closing the digital divide and creating opportunities for growth.

By supporting the innovation corridor in the Fraser Valley, and creating a new quantum computing institute at SFU Surrey, this government is helping distribute the benefits of a sustainable economy throughout the Lower Mainland.

For people in the valley, that means more opportunities for a good-paying job, more options for housing, a shorter commute, and more time with family.

B.C. will add one million people to its population over the next 10 years, putting pressure on B.C.'s transportation and trade corridors.

British Columbians are already spending too much time in gridlock.

This government is getting people moving.

Government's partnerships with local governments means that work is already underway on a long-term vision for transit and transportation in the Lower Mainland.

British Columbians can look forward to more options like rapid transit, HOV lanes and commuter rail out to the Fraser Valley, and high-speed rail connections with our neighbours to the south.

Not all of this growth is happening in the Lower Mainland.

This government is taking an all-of-B.C. approach with an integrated transportation plan to reduce congestion, and build for trade and business growth.

To keep people and goods moving, government is extending its transportation capital plan from three years to five years.

This change will allow for better planning of major projects like the George Massey crossing.



British Columbians are proud of this province, our people and our way of life.

They love where they live, and they want to stay.

As you begin a new legislative session, this government calls on you to keep the people of B.C. at the centre of your work.

Their future – our future – depends on the choices we make.

This government will continue the work it started two and a half years ago to make life better for people.

With more child care, more housing, and good jobs with high wages.

With affordable, livable communities, resilient in the face of climate change.

Where all Indigenous peoples are full partners in shaping our province's future.

A province full of people who are skilled, confident and ready for the road ahead.

A place of hope and opportunity.

A stronger province – for everyone.