

BUDGET 2026 SPEECH

SECURING B.C.'S FUTURE

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Lekwungen peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, upon whose territories we are gathered.

Mr. Speaker, I present this budget with a heavy heart.

People throughout the province and across the country are grieving the terrible tragedy in Tumbler Ridge.

We think about those whose lives have been changed forever, and we mourn the precious lives lost.

We mourn the future they were supposed to have, the dreams they never got to achieve.

British Columbians are standing with everyone impacted by this horrific tragedy.

And we will do everything in our power to support people through this dark time.

As we continue with the business of government, our hearts and minds are with the people in Tumbler Ridge.

Mr. Speaker, this past year has been immensely challenging.

One year ago, we witnessed the launch of an unprovoked and unjustified trade war at the hands of our closest ally.

The trade war and rupture of the world order continue to have ripple effects that are being felt around the world.

This budget is different from our past budgets, because this moment is different.

We are in a period of serious fiscal pressure.

Global uncertainty is slowing growth.

Commodity markets are volatile.

The housing market has cooled.

At the same time, costs are rising for everything from health care to building infrastructure.

And British Columbians are feeling it too.

Families are stretched by the rising cost of living.

We must be disciplined, focused and honest about the choices ahead.

We must assume this pressure on our revenue is the new normal and operate accordingly.

And in this budget, we have done that.

Our priorities are clear:

Protect and improve core public services people rely on, like health care and education.

Keep B.C. one of the lowest-taxed provinces for middle- and working-class families.

Reduce the deficit responsibly over time while protecting what's working.

To achieve this, we are taking three key steps.

First, we will make the public sector leaner, so more dollars reach the front lines.

Second, we will pace infrastructure projects carefully, delivering them efficiently without driving up costs.

Third, we will make changes to generate new revenue, while taking action to grow the economy and secure the long-term impact of major projects.

This is about making careful choices now to avoid more difficult ones later.

SETTING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Mr. Speaker, over the past eight years, we've built the foundations a strong province depends on.

Hospitals, schools, roads, transit, housing and clean electricity are being delivered to support communities and good jobs throughout British Columbia.

This was done at a time when the B.C. economy was being hit simultaneously by numerous disruptions.

A global pandemic. Soaring inflation. Devastating wildfires and flooding. And now an unprovoked trade war.

We entered this period from a position of strength, with one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios in the country.

This gave us room to absorb shocks and invest.

We were able to deliver income support, ICBC rebates and affordability measures when it was needed most.

Our government delivered the B.C. Family Benefit to help with the cost of raising children.

We cut child care fees by more than half.

Car insurance rates were dramatically reduced.

These measures helped ease the hit on households.

Today, housing costs are coming down from peak levels.

Rent prices are falling faster here than anywhere else in the country.

And through the Rental Protection Fund, more than 2,100 homes have been protected in under three years. This goal was reached early and under budget.

Children are learning in new schools – we've created 23,500 new seats, with another 23,500 on the way.

People are receiving treatment in 14 new and improved hospitals, with 20 more underway.

They're also accessing care in 41 new urgent- and primary-care centres, with five more to come.

Rapid transit projects like the Surrey Langley SkyTrain extension and the Broadway Subway Project will get people to the places they need to go, faster.

MAKING LIFE EASIER

Mr. Speaker, a lot of progress has been made to improve life and bring down costs.

But we know many families are struggling.

People keep working harder but feel like they aren't getting further ahead.

The cost of everyday life keeps going up, especially at the grocery store.

This year, we will bring forward legislation to ban the property controls that restrict businesses from selling fresh food near grocery stores, spurring more competition and getting food prices down.

We are also introducing legislation to make it easier for businesses to move goods and provide services across provincial borders.

Barriers between provinces that complicate trade make it harder to process food locally, which limits competition and drives up food prices.

By strengthening supply chains, making the food we eat here at home and allowing more competition across provincial lines, we can address some of the structural reasons for high food costs.

MAKING CAREFUL CHOICES

Mr. Speaker, this budget is also about facing our fiscal reality with clarity.

As times change, so must our approach.

B.C.'s economy has many strengths, but it also has big challenges.

We must make strategic choices about where we will spend our resources.

We are scrutinizing government spending and ensuring as many dollars as possible reach the front lines in classrooms and emergency rooms.

When it comes to our fiscal position, Budget 2026 reduces the deficit, carefully and thoughtfully over time.

So, how do we achieve this?

We do it through making disciplined decisions.

As many families make careful decisions to keep their household finances in order, so too must we.

We have begun a multi-step process to adjust government spending to respond to the fiscal reality we face.

This includes reducing operational and administrative costs and saving on contracting, hiring and travel.

We are continuing a hiring freeze in the public service.

We've launched reviews across the public sector at health authorities, with post-secondary institutions and through CleanBC.

Budget 2026 continues this work.

This means reducing staffing levels across the public sector by 15,000 full-time positions over the next few years.

We are making careful decisions about where these reductions will take place.

We will protect our vital front-line services in areas like health care and education, while reducing bureaucracy and administration.

We are also adjusting the pace of our capital plan to protect our ability to deliver projects over the long term.

This is not about stopping.

We will continue to outpace other provinces in per-capita investment in schools, child care centres and transit.

We will keep opening new hospitals and we'll break ground on a permanent home for SFU's new medical school in Surrey this year.

This is about adjusting the pace of some of the things we want to do, so we can do what we need to do to secure B.C.'s future.

Under our government, B.C. is among the lowest-taxed provinces in Canada for working and middle-class families.

This budget doesn't change that.

We made the right choices to cancel the carbon tax and to bring down housing costs, keeping more money in people's pockets.

But the reality facing every province is the same: growth has not kept pace with the cost of delivering public services.

If we want to protect health care, schools, child care and the services people rely on, we need to rebuild a stable and sustainable revenue base.

That is what Budget 2026 does.

It makes careful tax changes so we can protect services and avoid deep cuts, while keeping B.C. competitive.

People earning under \$149,000 will continue to pay the lowest personal income taxes in the country.

Budget 2026 includes a change to the first income-tax bracket of about half a percentage point.

We'll offset the extra cost for lower-income earners by increasing the B.C. Tax Reduction Credit.

We're also updating some housing-related taxes.

Those with homes above \$3 million in value will be asked to contribute a bit more.

The property-tax deferment program is being changed to help those who need it most.

And the vast majority of homeowners see no change.

Mr. Speaker, these are careful, considered choices.

At a time of global uncertainty, Budget 2026 is about protecting what matters most and building on B.C.'s strengths.

BUILDING ON B.C.'S STRENGTHS

Mr. Speaker, because we refuse to balance the books on the backs of families, the path forward is clear:

Grow the economy and grow it with urgency and purpose.

When more people are working, when wages are rising, and when investment is landing in our communities, families are better off – and government has the resources to protect the services people count on.

British Columbia starts from a position of strength.

We have abundant natural resources, clean and reliable electricity, and ports that connect us directly to the fastest-growing markets in the world.

Most importantly, we have people who are hardworking, entrepreneurial and ready to bring it all together.

That strength is already translating into real results.

New mines and LNG projects are reaching final investment decisions.

Major projects are advancing.

Capital is choosing B.C.

We are determined to make that growth work for people.

That means new training opportunities, more pathways into good-paying jobs and a clear plan to ensure British Columbians are first in line for the opportunities ahead.

Over the next 24 months, B.C. is projected to be the second fastest-growing province in terms of GDP in Canada.

Our job is to turn that momentum into lasting prosperity and build a stronger, more self-reliant economy that works for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, this is how we build that strong, secure future.

A future with homes you can afford. Jobs with good pay. Health care when and where you need it.
An economy that works for everyone, not just the few.

MOVING MAJOR PROJECTS FORWARD

To deliver on that future, we need to start with a strong foundation for growth.

We need to move major projects ahead faster, invest in skills training and improve B.C.'s position as a desirable place to invest.

In moments like this, British Columbians know we can't just sit back and hope for the best.

We must build, because building is how we protect our future.

And to build, we need power. Clean, affordable, reliable power.

We are ready to step up.

B.C. Hydro's 2025 call for power drew nearly double the targeted energy, with 14 proposals totalling over 9,100 gigawatt hours a year – enough to power about 900,000 homes.

The North Coast Transmission Line is a nation-building project that will deliver clean energy to power port expansions, LNG facilities and mines.

And it will be built in true partnership with First Nations.

It's grounded in recent agreements that reflect shared decision-making, shared benefits and, in some cases, co-ownership.

Once operational, it's expected to contribute nearly \$10 billion per year to GDP and generate \$950 million a year in revenue.

It will create almost 10,000 direct jobs per year on average and reduce emissions by about two to three million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

This line creates the certainty companies need to make final investment decisions.

And it ensures opportunity translates into jobs and lasting benefits for local communities.

As our trade mission to Asia last year made clear, growing economies also need access to more energy.

They are looking for B.C.'s LNG to meet energy demand and support the transition to a cleaner economy.

Our LNG has one of the lowest carbon footprints in the world, thanks to electrification.

Six major LNG projects are complete, underway or reaching final investment decisions this year.

We're doing all this in partnership with First Nations, moving projects forward with confidence and clarity.

CAPITALIZING ON CRITICAL MINERALS

Mr. Speaker, with certainty on power, mines can move from concept to construction.

Last year we saw a record-breaking \$750 million invested in mineral exploration.

For too long, mining projects were tied up in delays and inefficient processes.

We have made significant progress on speeding up approvals.

In 2025, almost 35% more exploration permits were issued than in 2024.

We also reduced timelines for major mine applications by 35%.

Let me give you an example of what that looks like on the ground.

The Mt. Milligan copper-gold mine expansion near Fort. St. James had its permitting times cut in half.

This expansion supports the existing 574 jobs and as much as \$400 million in projected capital spending.

Centerra Gold's CEO told us this was "a strong example of what can be accomplished when governments, First Nations and industry work together in support of responsible resource development."

I know how important it is for businesses and government to work together.

We heard that permitting times were creating problems for the industry. We listened and we fixed it.

In January, our government announced new fixed permitting timelines and an additional \$3 million to expedite approvals in the mining industry.

Budget 2026 also includes more than \$40 million over three years to address urgent capacity needs, reduce duplication and slash the permitting backlog.

On top of that, we're introducing new tax credits to align regulations with the federal government, to continue to support the mining industry.

BUILDING OUR WORKFORCE

With all these exciting projects moving forward, it's no question that we are on the cusp of a huge demand for skilled people.

Mr. Speaker, this is where we are making some of our biggest investments.

Because investing in young people is investing in our future.

Budget 2026 includes \$241 million in new funding over three years to train people for in-demand skills and higher wages.

This will address waitlists, increase per-seat funding and expand skilled-trades certification.

That means more spots will be available within the next two years for people to train for these high-paying, in-demand jobs.

I think about people like Gord, who had been working in an Amazon warehouse earning \$20 an hour moving boxes around.

He did some entry-level training on welding and got some jobs out of that, then did the next level, and the next. Then he got his Red Seal.

Now, he earns more than \$150,000 a year and his life has been transformed by the opportunity that trades training gave him.

For young people trying to make ends meet, a new, high-paying job provides security, financial freedom and an opportunity to build a life in their community.

For communities, it means the wealth generated circulates and multiplies locally, supporting local businesses.

All this from a reliable, high-paying job.

LEVERAGING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As the economic engine of a more independent economy, British Columbia needs to have an attractive business environment for investors and entrepreneurs.

I firmly believe that investing and growing in B.C. is one of the smartest and safest decisions investors can make.

Look at Photonic, a quantum technology company based in Coquitlam.

Founder Dr. Stephanie Simmons said she started her company in B.C. because it's the best place to recruit top-tier quantum talent and leverage local academic research.

With its new approach to quantum computing, Photonic has raised \$375 million since 2016.

In fact, it just had one of the largest quantum-technology financings ever announced in Canada, raising \$180 million in its latest investment round.

The federal government has been clear that provinces must participate financially to access federal stimulus funding.

That's why Budget 2026 commits to allocating \$400 million to a special account so we can quickly capitalize on federal funding opportunities.

This could leverage billions in federal stimulus funding and private-sector investment.

This funding is critical to building a stronger, more secure future for people in B.C.

SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Speaker, another critical part of building a stronger, more secure future is getting the most value out of our natural resources.

Our manufacturers have the skills and expertise to do just that, by processing and refining our made-in-B.C. materials into something even more valuable.

There are nearly 20,000 manufacturing businesses in B.C. employing more than 170,000 people.

And the sector is expected to grow by another 50,000 jobs in the next decade.

That's more people like Ted, the founder of Spearhead Timberworks in Nelson who I met when I visited his business.

He has an incredible operation, specializing in designing and fabricating architectural timber and steel.

Spearhead received \$7.5 million from our Manufacturing Jobs Fund, which will help them add state-of-the-art product lines and increase capacity to fabricate complex, high-value timber projects using B.C. wood.

A new Manufacturing and Processing Investment Tax Credit will help manufacturers like Ted invest in productivity and innovation so they can continue to do what they do best.

Some of our largest manufacturers are in the maritime industry.

B.C.'s maritime sector is the biggest in Canada, employing more than 34,000 people.

And there are more opportunities on the horizon as the federal government increases defence spending.

Through the Look West strategy, we're aiming to secure 35% of federal defence vessel contracts in 10 years.

To do that, shipbuilders need more support.

Budget 2026 extends the Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Tax Credit.

This credit supports employers hiring shipbuilding and ship-repair apprentices, securing a sustainable future for the industry.

We're also supporting innovators, scientists and entrepreneurs by updating the Scientific Research and Development Tax Credit to align with federal changes.

It's by supporting our innovators, our manufacturers and our businesses that we move B.C. forward.

PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS MOST

Health care

Mr. Speaker, a strong economy is about more than statistics and forecasts.

It's about taking care of people.

It's about creating the wealth we need to improve and protect vital services.

And when it comes to vital services, health care is at the top of the list.

It's also facing big challenges.

Demographics are shifting. Health-care workers are retiring. The cost of providing care is increasing.

Our government has been working hard to make sure British Columbians can access the care they need, when they need it.

A lot of progress has been made.

For one, we're building the workforce of tomorrow.

This summer, we'll welcome the very first class of medical students to the new SFU medical school in Surrey.

And in the year ahead, we expect to break ground on the school's permanent home.

We're starting to see results that matter.

Every day, hundreds of people in B.C. are getting a phone call or email letting them know they have a new family doctor or nurse practitioner.

This is in addition to hundreds of maintenance and renovation projects to modernize and upgrade hospitals throughout the province.

These projects represent the largest investment in health-care infrastructure in B.C.'s history.

But we know we still have more to do.

We must remain focused on protecting what we've built and delivering better, faster health care for people.

This spring, as part of a national pharmacare agreement, B.C. will provide free, enhanced public coverage for both menopausal hormone therapy and a wide range of diabetes medications and devices.

We are also continuing to fund in-vitro fertilization treatments so people can start a family.

But we also know that the system cannot simply keep doing the same things and be sustainable over the long term.

Let us be clear: privatization, or a U.S.-style two-tier system, is not an option for British Columbia.

We must always be a place where we take care of each other, no matter how much money someone has.

That is why your government is making responsible choices to reform care, not to cut or privatize it.

A comprehensive review of health authorities is identifying administrative duplication and redirecting savings to the front lines.

Since the review began, 1,100 administrative positions have been eliminated, closed or left vacant.

And the savings are being invested in front-line patient care.

Responsible choices also mean earlier intervention, so people can get help before they end up in hospital.

It means bolstering community-based services, so fewer people depend on emergency care.

Because British Columbians deserve a health-care system they can rely on today and into the future.

Child care and education

Mr. Speaker, every baby born in B.C. is something to cherish.

Becoming a parent is one of the biggest adventures and most rewarding chapters that many of us will ever take on.

We know that finding affordable child care can be a worry for new parents.

We've been working hard to make it easier for families to access affordable, high-quality child care close to home.

Since 2018, families have accessed nearly 58,000 new licensed child care spaces throughout B.C.

B.C.'s child care affordability programs are saving families an average of \$7,200 per year on child care costs and helping people access child care when they need it most.

People like Rachel, a single mom who was laid off right after she returned from maternity leave.

Finances were extremely tight and she was considering pulling her child out of child care to make ends meet.

But a phone call to the Affordable Child Care Benefit line changed everything.

Rachel learned she was eligible for six months of child care subsidy while she searched for work.

And guess what – she got a new job, her child is still in child care and she no longer needs the subsidy.

That's what these programs are all about – providing people like Rachel with the support they need, when they need it.

Budget 2026 invests \$330 million over three years to protect the progress we've made and stabilize the child care services families rely on.

As we build a bright future for our children, we need to make sure children have everything they need in the present.

A good education is a fundamental part of that.

Budget 2026 commits to protecting the progress we have made and doing more.

New funding of \$634 million is being provided for the K-12 system, including \$167 million for the Classroom Enhancement Fund over three years.

This means more teachers, including special-education teachers and counsellors for students with support needs.

Mr. Speaker, we want all young people to have access to the supports they need to live a full, happy life.

Today, many are facing increasing pressures and need access to mental-health support.

Our government is focusing on early intervention, so young people can get the help they need as early as possible.

We are expanding our network of in-person and virtual-health wellness supports for young people and their families.

We are establishing Integrated Child and Youth teams in communities throughout the province, so young people and their families can connect to the care they need when and where they need it.

And we are hiring additional specialists to support young people at more than 50 locations across all health authorities.

Housing

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2026 protects the things that matter most.

For our government, housing has always been a top priority. We've been very clear about that.

We have spent years reversing the damage of an overheated housing market.

More affordable rentals have been built than ever before.

We took on foreign speculation in the housing market.

Vacant units have become homes filled with life.

New supportive-housing and shelter spaces have brought people out of the cold.

Combined, these measures are creating about 95,000 new homes.

Budget 2026 continues this progress, committing more than \$2 billion each year to keep delivering more homes for people.

Community safety

Mr. Speaker, British Columbia consistently ranks as one of the most desirable places to live.

A lot of factors go into that. Health care. Education. Job opportunities.

But people need to feel safe in their communities.

When it comes to community safety, we are facing big challenges.

To reduce street crime, we're strengthening enforcement and bail rules, helping people move indoors and improving access to mental-health care.

Crime rates are coming down.

But we know there is still much, much more to do.

It's often a small number of people committing most of the petty crime.

That's why Budget 2026 includes \$139 million over three years to help with community-specific safety concerns in neighbourhoods throughout B.C.

Budget 2026 also expands treatment and recovery services.

B.C. is opening 100 more involuntary-care beds in Surrey and Prince George to support people with complex needs, with 28 already operating in Maple Ridge and Surrey.

This is part of a larger effort to tackle the toxic-drug crisis by expanding treatment and recovery options, helping people rebuild their lives.

The extortion crisis has families south of the Fraser living with fear and intimidation.

We are taking immediate action to protect people.

We have brought together a B.C. Extortion Task Force – the largest of its kind in B.C. history.

We met with the federal government, which committed more specialized officers and dedicated RCMP helicopter support for police on the ground.

We invested \$500,000 to strengthen victim supports, and the federal government is matching that.

We are also calling on the federal government to close loopholes in our immigration laws and strengthen criminal laws, so no suspects can file for fake refugee status.

And so those who are arrested stay in jail.

We are establishing a community advisory group to listen to community concerns and connect with law enforcement and government, so people in our communities are heard, supported and safe.

There are more police on the streets in Surrey right now than ever before.

That means more patrols, stops and targeted enforcement.

So people are safer in their own communities.

SECURING TODAY, BUILDING TOMORROW

Mr. Speaker, in a world of uncertainty, Budget 2026 makes careful choices to protect what matters most and build a strong future.

As our Olympic athletes compete halfway around the world, and as we get set to welcome the World Cup to B.C., I have a deep sense of pride.

Pride in British Columbians. Pride in what we have achieved so far.

B.C. is a proud member of Team Canada.

Being a part of the team means moving forward on major nation-building, job-creating projects.

It means leading the way on opening up interprovincial trade.

It means working with the federal government and other provinces to create a stronger, more independent Canadian economy.

And it means choosing unity over division.

British Columbians know that division weakens us all.

We know that our strength comes from standing together, united as proud Canadians.

This is a turning point.

Every generation of British Columbians has faced challenges.

Every generation has been asked to step up, to seize opportunities, and to make life better for the next.

This generation faces uncertainty unlike any in recent memory.

The road ahead will not always be easy.

But Mr. Speaker, when I look around at other places, there's nowhere else I'd rather be.

Because we've got it all.

With a steady hand, careful decisions and smart investments, we won't just navigate uncertainty.

We'll shape a stronger, brighter future for all British Columbians.

Thank you.