



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Honourable Judith Guichon, OBC

Lieutenant-Governor

at the

Opening of the Sixth Session,

Fortieth Parliament

of the

Province of British Columbia

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WELCOME

My fellow British Columbians, and members of the legislature, let us acknowledge first we have the honour of gathering upon the traditional Lekwungen territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. I wish also to recognise, with respect, the history, wisdom, and culture of all our province's Indigenous peoples, including Inuit and Metis.

Members, I will speak today about charting our course through uncertain times to build a strong future. First, let us honour those who contributed to who we are today.

TRIBUTES

As we remember British Columbians, let me begin by speaking to the recent tragedy in Quebec City.

Let us speak in one voice to express our condolences, condemn the hatred and violence. Let us re-affirm who we are as Canadians.

I want to thank the Imam for his prayers.

First responders place themselves in harm's way to help others. This year, an entire nation mourned Constable Sarah Beckett, who lost her life in the line of duty.

We lost those who represented British Columbians in Ottawa or in this legislature, Patrick Crofton, Len Marchand, Frederick King, Samuel Bawlf, Don Phillips, and John Nuraney.

And those who inspired us like Rolly Fox, John Young, Stanley Burke, Pritam Singh Jauhal, William Esson, W.P. Kinsella, Harold Mann, Vic Rapp, Dawn Coe-Jones, Dave Broadfoot, and Joe Wai.

And those who helped build vibrant communities, such as Robin Hood, Murray Newman, Bing Thom, Jim Munro, Dr. Raghbir Bains, David Strangway, and David Holmberg.

British Columbia First Nations lost leaders like Philomena Alphonse, Donald Moses, Kathleen Green, Nelson Keitlah, Alban Michael, Norman Tait, Marjorie McRae, Daphne Odjig, Rocky Wilson, Joseph Bartleman, Arthur Manuel, David Bob, and Ollie Chickite.

Today, a service is held for Orsa Marie Douglas, the last living direct descendent of Sir James Douglas, one of the key founding fathers of our great province.

Finally, some of our co-workers and friends who worked for the legislature, John Crawford, Gary Miller, and Deb Hartung.

This year, we celebrate Canada's 150th year. Let us remember the women and men who gave so much to build our country and province.

CORE PRINCIPLES

From these builders the torch has been passed to us to keep B.C. strong, today and for future generations.

But risk is all around us: A weak global economy, the rising tide of protectionism in the United States and in Europe.

We must stand strong on our principles of open and fair trade. For all British Columbians, and especially the 60,000 workers in our forestry sector,

On softwood lumber or any other matter, standing up for British Columbians requires standing upon principles clearly and consistently:

Live within our means; grow the economy, not the size of government; believe in our citizens, not dogmas, doctrines or ideologies; create jobs so that British Columbians can build a future; and protect this magnificent place we call home for future generations.

Principles are brought to life with a plan.

SECURING A BRIGHT FUTURE

Your government has a plan. The BC Jobs Plan to grow the economy, and create opportunities—combined with controlling government spending. After all, isn't that why people live in our great province: Secure a great job, own a home, and be able to keep more of their hard-earned money.

Thanks to hardworking British Columbians and the plan, B.C. is getting results.

B.C. has Canada's best fiscal record, with a triple-A credit rating and four consecutive balanced budgets, with a fifth coming next week.

Since the launch of the BC Jobs Plan 5 years ago, B.C. is first in Canada in economic growth.

B.C. is first in creating jobs in Canada—and more British Columbians are working than ever before.

B.C. has the lowest taxes for middle class families.

B.C. has Canada's best health outcomes, including the best cancer survival rates.

B.C. students rank first in the country in student outcomes.

Making record investments while not raising taxes, your government is on track to be free of any operating debt by 2021. For the first time in 40 years, children born that year will no longer be asked to pay for the burdens that our generation has placed upon them.

It could be argued that many other governments are adding to the burden of future generations.

Now more than ever, it is critical that your government has a plan that will protect and grow jobs across our province, despite the risks around us.

That is the only way to sustain and ensure the services and infrastructure families and citizens depend on to get ahead.

HEALTH CARE

This includes record investments in healthcare. By 2018, our investments will surpass \$19 billion per year.

Investments like new hospitals in Campbell River, Comox, Haida Gwaii, and the new St. Paul's in Vancouver. Expansions in Surrey, Burnaby, Vernon, Kelowna, and Penticton. Major upgrades in Kamloops, the BC Children's and Women's Hospital, Cranbrook, and the redeveloped Royal Columbian Hospital.

Our success is measured in North America's longest life expectancy, and lowest heart attack rates in Canada. It's measured in the over 3,800 British Columbians receiving medication for hepatitis C. It's measured in 500 new addiction beds and more than 7,300 community mental health beds.

We are also a global centre of innovation. A global leader in genomics and personalized medicine, and led by Dr. Julio Montaner, B.C. is a world leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS, with mortality down by 80 per cent.

OPIOIDS

A strong healthcare system is vital to address unforeseen crises.

British Columbia was the first province to declare a public health emergency for fentanyl, and the first to deregulate life-saving naloxone kits, and get them into the hands of first responders and at-risk British Columbians.

By March 31, 500 new addiction treatment beds and more than 20 overdose prevention sites will have opened.

Your government demanded action, and the Trudeau government responded by regulating pill presses, simplifying the approval process for supervised consumption sites, and coordinating efforts against trafficking with Canada's partners in the People's Republic of China.

Your government is taking action—and ready to do more.

OPPORTUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING

Your government has made record investments in creating opportunity through education, skills training, and higher learning.

British Columbia is investing a record \$5.1 billion per year for public education, and an overall investment of \$7.5 billion in education and training each year. Average per-pupil funding is now over \$8,900, the highest ever, even with an increase of 10,000 students in the past two years.

B.C. leads Canada for student outcomes, and ranks third around the world, with dramatic increases in high school completion rates for students with special needs, E.L.L. students, and Aboriginal students.

This government has worked with the Teachers' Federation to achieve the longest negotiated settlement in history, ensuring 6 years of labour peace in our classrooms so that our children can to learn without interruption.

Your government and the Federation have reached agreement to invest an additional \$50 million immediately to hire up to 1000 new teachers. That's in addition to the Learning Improvement Fund, which has helped teachers to focus more time and resources where it counts: on our children.

The Supreme Court has spoken. Your government is committed to working in good faith with our teachers to put our students first.

INFRASTRUCTURE

To keep our students safe, your government has committed \$1.7 billion in new infrastructure over the next three years, and invested \$1.3 billion in more than 160 completed school-seismic projects, with more to come over the next three years.

From schools to other vital infrastructure your government is investing \$10 billion—for new hospitals, highways and roads and other projects like the Surrey LRT, Broadway subway, and the George Massey Tunnel replacement project.

Your government is preparing for the future with the Site C dam that will provide clean and affordable power for a growing B.C. for a hundred years. That project has created almost 1,900 jobs already and 33,000 total person-years of employment over the life of the project.

And we will be ready for 2 million more people who will come to make their home here in the next 25 years; our economy will continue to grow, and we will see more people drive electric cars as technology evolves.

INNOVATIVE SOCIAL INITIATIVES

Your government has moved forward with innovative investments to prepare our citizens for B.C.'s growing economy.

\$1,200 to every family with a child born after 2006. So that they can start saving for their child's post-secondary education. Already, 55,000 families have received almost \$66 million.

More than 4,300 moms and dads now have the means to get off social assistance, find training and work through the Single Parents Employment Initiative

Record-breaking investment in adoptions have resulted in the most ever children who have been placed in forever homes.

B.C. has doubled the length of time young adults who were in government care can receive benefits, and extended the maximum age to 26.

No other province does that.

And between 2006 and 2014, the number of children living in low income families in B.C. has fallen by half. Even as we continue to grow in population, British Columbia has 79,000 fewer children living in a low income situation.

SAFE COMMUNITIES

Your government has taken decisive actions to keep our communities safe.

That includes an expanded Guns and Gangs Strategy, increased funding for the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit, new task forces on illegal arms and money laundering, and this spring, a new Office of Crime Reduction and Gang Research.

There is more work to do. But gang-related murders are down; more gangsters are behind bars; hundreds of illegal weapons are off the streets, including more than 1,200 surrendered as part of gun amnesty.

PAYING BACK BRITISH COLUMBIANS

Across all of these fronts, British Columbia is making strong progress—always understanding there is more to do.

Fiscal responsibility and a growing economy is the foundation that gives British Columbia the ability to do more, and to be caring from strength.

After years of sacrifice by all of us in British Columbia through challenging times, working together with a plan, your government is now in a position to pay you back, to relieve some financial burdens, and to invest in your household and in your families.

HOUSING

On housing, your government has made the largest single year investment in Canadian history in, creating nearly 5,000 units of affordable rental housing the elderly, for students, for persons living with disabilities, for persons living on low to moderate incomes.

Your government has exempted the property transfer tax for British Columbians buying newly built homes valued up to \$750,000. 9,100 British Columbians have taken this opportunity, saving almost \$72 million dollars.

Your government has taken action to correct the real estate market with a luxury tax, as well as a tax on foreign purchasers of homes in Metro Vancouver.

And through the BC HOME Partnership program, your government is making an investment in the people who will build our future: first-time homebuyers.

This is an investment in British Columbians who are starting their adult lives, working hard, saving a down-payment for their first home. They can now count on the government to match their investment to build their savings.

This spring, your government will continue to work with municipalities to encourage greater supply of housing, including building more units, and creating smarter, greener communities, connected by transit.

RELIEF FROM FISCAL BURDENS

As these investments are made in people, your government is now in a position to take a further step to ease the financial burdens on citizens.

British Columbians have worked hard. Your government's plan to control spending, balance budgets, and pay down the debt has resulted in growing surpluses.

That money belongs to you. And in the coming budget, your government will provide financial relief to taxpayers, while continuing to make investments in the services people rely on.

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Government is in a position to do this because it has a plan to continue growing our economy into the future. From small business to tourism and technology, to natural resources, trade, and manufacturing.

SMALL BUSINESS

Small businesses are the core of our economy. Over 388,000 small businesses are responsible for a third of British Columbia's GDP, and jobs for over one million people.

In five years, your government has made it easier and less expensive for small business to interact with government, established the Small Business Venture Tax Credit, and continued to reduce unnecessary red tape—which the Canadian Federation of Independent Business recognized again this year as leading the country.

For five years, the BC Jobs Plan has supported B.C.'s private sector to grow and flourish on the global stage. That creates jobs. Your government will continue that work through the next chapter of the Plan.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Rural communities are the backbone of our province, but today they are facing the challenge of low global prices for commodities.

Your government has invested \$25 million this year, and \$25 million more in each of the next two years to help small communities diversify their economies through the Rural Dividend.

And in the coming weeks, your government will implement a new Rural Economic Development Strategy.

It begins with an unwavering commitment to get to yes on building projects that create jobs in rural communities. Projects like Site C and LNG.

Secondly, investments to create jobs through necessary infrastructure improvements.

And thirdly, a longer term plan to further diversify rural economies, by encouraging the growth of new and emerging sectors, like technology.

TECH SECTOR

In centres like Vancouver, Surrey, Victoria, and Kelowna, B.C.'s tech sector is vibrant.

Last year, tech contributed \$14.1 billion to our economy. More than 9,900 companies have created more than 100,000 jobs, with wages 75 per cent higher than average.

In five years, your government has supported tech through the BC Tech Strategy, including a \$100 million tech fund, and worked with B.C.'s teachers to introduce the basics of coding to all students in the sixth grade.

Your government recently established a new provincial innovation network, with UBC President Santa Ono as chief advisor. And this spring, Vancouver will once again welcome people from all over the world for the second annual BC Tech Summit.

We will welcome them to call B.C. their home: a place to invest and create jobs for British Columbians.

TOURISM

We are a destination for global tourists, and records are being shattered from year to year, with more than 5.1 million visitors last year.

We see that reflected in increased ferry traffic, and 84 weekly flights to and from China—and the 127,000 British Columbians working in 19,000 tourism businesses

In five years, your government has successfully promoted Aboriginal tourism, more than doubling the number of Aboriginal tourism businesses in 10 years, and supported high profile events with a new Tourism Events Program.

The work continues. Your government will work with BC Ferries to provide a new seasonal ferry service between Port Hardy and Bella Coola, and make investments in tourism infrastructure such as highway rest areas, airports and cycling trails.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT

British Columbia is a destination for the world—and is Canada's Pacific Gateway to Asia and the world.

We rely on international trade, and continue to develop new customers. In five years, your government has built Canada's most diverse markets, with 40 per cent of B.C. trade with Asia, up from 25 per cent just 10 years ago.

In the coming years, your government will continue to attract major international firms to locate their North American headquarters in Vancouver, and work with small and medium-sized businesses to enter new markets.

FORESTRY

Diversifying our markets protects us from depending on one market.

Your government and the forestry sector have worked hard to protect our forestry workers from the impacts of any trade disputes with the United States by opening new markets over the last 14 years, resulting in an increase in lumber exports to China of 1,800 per cent.

The federal government is working to resolve the trade dispute with the United States. But B.C. supplies half of Canada's softwood lumber exports. Your government will name an envoy to Washington to make sure B.C. has continued access to the American market, working with the forestry sector and the federal government to secure a new agreement on softwood lumber.

Your government will continue to support innovation and competitiveness, expand opportunities for B.C. forest products overseas, find opportunities for B.C.'s forest fibre, as well as value-added and pulp and paper industries.

LNG

Just like in forestry, workers in B.C.'s clean natural gas sector need global markets to thrive. But unforeseen headwinds have created challenging conditions.

Despite that, the Woodfibre LNG project has made a final investment decision. Other LNG projects continue to move forward in British Columbia with over \$20 billion invested already—including large projects on the cusp of making a decision in the next two years.

World markets may go up and down. But bringing home the generational opportunity of LNG remains within reach because of the work that has been done in our province.

A fiscal framework that gives certainty to investors, and ensures B.C. is globally competitive as markets recover. Strengthened and enduring partnerships with 29 of 32 First Nations.

And your government has made a down payment for all of us. The British Columbia Prosperity Fund already has \$500,000,000. A savings plan for our future, and to pay down our debt.

Your government will continue to work with proponents, and ensure British Columbians have the skills to be first in line for those jobs that will come through the Skills for Jobs Blueprint strategy.

MINING

Perhaps no industry has endured more ups and downs than mining. From near extinction 16 years ago, through more recent challenges of low global prices, mining is rebounding in British Columbia. It contributes \$9.7 billion to our economy—in part because \$2 billion was invested in exploration projects in our province over the last five years.

More than 46,000 British Columbians and their families rely on mining—and the world depends on them for the raw materials needed to make everything from transmission wire to consumer electronics.

Even through these uncertain times, we continue to see new mines. Your government established new targets for upgrades and expansions to nine currently operating mines by 2020, and eight new mines under construction or in operation by 2022.

Today, there are two new mines under construction that will generate 1,000 jobs in rural B.C.

The work is not done. Your government will continue to support the most innovative, sustainable, and safe mining sector in the world.

AGRIFOODS

In agrifood and seafood, 63,000 British Columbians stand proud as providers of the world's best products.

In five years, your government has focused on identifying more markets and opportunities—and succeeded in increasing the sector by 18 per cent.

Your government will continue to work to add 3,500 jobs in northern First Nations, and work on 51 actions to grow agrifood and seafood revenues by 43 per cent in the next three years.

Your government is also focused on creating new markets and opportunities for our world-leading craft beer and wine industries, by modernizing liquor laws, and giving consumers more choice.

That includes giving consumers opportunity to purchase B.C. wines in grocery stores—a move that people have been waiting for in our province, and a step that is wholly compliant within the rules of trade. To those who may differ in opinion let us say that we will continue to stand up for fair trade, stand up for our consumers and workers in the wine industry.

MANUFACTURING

Manufacturing continues to play a vital role in our diverse economy. 14,300 British Columbians work in high-tech manufacturing, and 8,300 in Canada's largest and most robust aerospace sector.

In five years, your government has contributed over \$1 million to meet manufacturers' needs, invested over \$5 million on a strategy to continue growth in aerospace, and delivered four sessions with industry leaders to identify opportunities and emerging challenges.

The work is not done. Your government will continue to connect manufacturing companies with new markets, and work with the federal government to build an aircraft simulation and training facility in Comox.

FIRST NATIONS

British Columbia's First Nations are becoming full partners in Canada's leading economy, with 485 economic and other reconciliation agreements in the past five years alone, and \$10 million invested to support community-driven skills training to prepare Aboriginal people for LNG opportunities.

There is unprecedented engagement and potential for nation to nation co-operation through the annual All Chiefs' gatherings with cabinet ministers—something that has only happened in the last four years in our province.

Your government has convened the first major healing event for families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, and introduced a new safety plan for Highway 16.

An important conversation on Indigenous child welfare has begun with the work of Grand Chief Ed John. This work must continue to strengthen families to care for their children.

From recognizing achievement, such as in sport with the Aboriginal Youth Excellence Awards, to bringing home sacred remains and cultural belongings—the work of reconciliation must continue.

FIVE CONDITIONS

Growing our economy must be done responsibly. Protecting our coast and our land with world leading systems, fairness for British Columbians, opportunities for our First Nations and Aboriginal peoples, and regulatory review and certification—these are the core principles of British Columbia's Five Conditions on new or expanded heavy-oil pipelines.

For more than four years, your government stood up for B.C. with those conditions—in a clear, consistent and principled way.

Canadians have not only to come to accept the Five Conditions; Canadians are taking actions to satisfy each condition.

Before the Trudeau government approved the Kinder Morgan Project, they took action on an historic Ocean Protection Plan committing to world-leading protection for B.C.'s coast.

Your government reached an unprecedented revenue-sharing agreement with the proponent for up to a billion dollars over 20 years.

B.C. will invest every penny of that in projects brought forward by community groups throughout our province to protect and enhance our environment.

ENVIRONMENT

B.C. is a recognized global leader on climate action, receiving the United Nations lighthouse award for our revenue-neutral carbon tax. Canada has committed to catching up to our price on carbon pollution.

Today, your government is taking further actions through the Climate Leadership Plan: 21 actions across all sectors of our economy, creating jobs and reducing emissions.

Your government is also taking action to protect our natural environment: the landscape and coast that is a reflection of who we are as British Columbians.

The Great Bear Rainforest Agreement was achieved after a decade of work and has been recognized through the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy Initiative.

And a new vision for BC Parks will protect and enhance one of the most important parks systems in the world. We can discover ourselves in our parks, so will future generations and people from around the world.

CONCLUSION

Members, we are the stewards of our environment in B.C. We are the builders of our economy.

With the risk of a weak global recovery and protectionism surrounding us, now more than ever, we must be vigilant.

It is up to you, members, to stand up to protect and create jobs for British Columbians in your communities—defend opportunities today so that families can build their future. Serve British Columbians while making sure they keep as much as possible of their hard-earned money.

As we celebrate Canada's Sesquicentennial this year, let us remember our connection to the land, and its critical importance to the success of our children.

It is up to you, members, to build a society that is caring and also strong—to be able to make a difference in peoples' lives not just today but also in the future.

There will be many immediate challenges that the world will throw our way.

In the face of those challenges, let us be strong with a plan for British Columbians.

Let us stand strong upon principles. Upon these principles and the bedrock foundation that is our constitutional monarchy, we will keep building a great British Columbia for all who call this beautiful province their home.