



## BC Throne Speech Focuses on Affordability

Feb 12, 2019



Lt.-Gov. Janet Austin read the minority New Democratic government's third Throne Speech this afternoon at the British Columbia Legislature. The heavy snowfall in the capital region meant the traditional military honour guard, ceremonial cannon salutes and performance by a military band were all cancelled. There had been concern that not all MLAs would be able to attend but most were able to make it by utilizing creative transportation options.

The Speech from the Throne laid out the Horgan government's plans for the coming year though some key details won't be revealed until the budget is tabled next Tuesday. It repeated the three constant themes of making life more affordable for families; investing in public services to make sure they are accessible, reliable and affordable; and building a prosperous economy that works for everyone.

Affordability for taxpayers was the key theme of the speech with new commitments made to improve billing transparency on cell phone bills, further steps to crack down on unfair payday loan practices, freezes on BC Ferry rates, and an introduction of new rules for ticket sales for live events. Government promised to take steps to fully implement B.C.'s affordable child care program and further action on housing affordability by speeding up much-needed rental housing and delivering more efficient and effective project approvals.



Other new commitments included a new museum to honour the contributions of Chinese Canadians to the province, new investments in the Royal BC Museum, official protection of parkland purchased last year and a food security task force to consider ways to maximize the benefits of B.C.'s rich agricultural land.

While the emerging liquified natural gas sector and the LNG Canada project was highlighted, British Columbia's traditional industries – forestry and mining, oil and gas, fisheries and farming, and renewable electricity – were also framed as key to the economy. Government committed to continue to work to increase local processing, promote Indigenous partnerships, and create jobs and opportunity for local workers and rural communities.

The public will need to wait until the budget next week for more details on CleanBC, the ambitious plan which will shift much of the province to electricity to help meet climate change goals. In December government announced it was planning financial incentives for electric vehicles and heat pumps as key strategies.

Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples will continue to be a priority and government pledged that B.C. will be the first province in Canada to introduce legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. 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.

Ongoing challenges at ICBC and BC Hydro were highlighted, and government committed to continue reforms at both crowns and address the escalating losses at the public auto insurer. The public was warned that more changes may be necessary if ICBC's financial situation does not improve. The government will also continue to investigate the root causes of money laundering and will be working to bring to account those involved.

The throne speech closed by addressing the spending scandal at the BC legislature, stating that further actions needed to be taken. Government promised to work with legislators to implement reforms that would restore public trust.

Cooperation with the B.C. Green Party was noted several times in the speech and Andrew Weaver said he was pleased with the action taken on his priority, the province's climate action plan. He said he expects to see legislation related to fuel standards for the transportation sector this session and will maintain pressure on government to continue steps to reduce emissions. Weaver reassured British Columbians that the minority government is stable, and he sees no reason his party would pull its support.

B.C. Liberal Leader Andrew Wilkinson was critical of government's aggressive tax agenda and said this ran counter to their promise of delivering on affordability. He promised his party would continue to challenge government on increased fees and taxes.