



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Her Honour the Honourable Wendy Cocchia

Lieutenant Governor

at the Opening of the

First Session, Forty-third Parliament

of the

Province of British Columbia

February 18, 2025

OPENING

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Elders, Chiefs, veterans, uniformed service members, leaders and distinguished guests.

I would like to start by acknowledging the ɫə́kwəŋən peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, upon whose territories we are gathered today.

Thank you to the ɫə́kwəŋən Traditional Dancers, Elder Frank George from the Songhees Nation, and Elder Mary Ann Thomas from the Esquimalt Nation for starting us off in a good way.

I am pleased to deliver my first Speech from the Throne, laying out your government's plan to defend British Columbians in uncertain times.

A plan to make sure people here can thrive, no matter what the world throws at us.

And to secure a brighter future for everyone who calls this beautiful place home.

IN MEMORIAM

I am honoured to be carrying on what has become a tradition in this place, by remembering some of the remarkable lives we have lost over the past year.

We mourn Iona Campagnolo, British Columbia's 27th lieutenant governor.

We remember Hereditary Chief Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla of Kwakiutl First Nation. Known as Bill Wilson, he was a fearless advocate for First Nations rights and freedoms.

We also mourn other Indigenous leaders, including Sim'oogit Hay'maas, Chief Chester Moore of Nisga'a Nation, as well as Elder Richard (Cody) Gus of Tseshaht First Nation, and Elder Josie Paul and her daughter Elder Edie Frederick of Lheidli T'enneh First Nation.

We honour the memory of Niilo Edwards, the first Executive Director and CEO of the First Nations Major Projects Coalition. Niilo was a visionary leader who believed in the power of partnerships and shared prosperity.

We join all Canadians in mourning Murray Sinclair, a tireless defender of rights and dignity for Indigenous Peoples.

From the world of music, we remember classical guitarist Alexander Dunn, rock drummer Rocket Norton, the musician Nell Smith, clarinettist Phil Nimmons, and Eleanor Collins, Canada's first lady of jazz.

We mourn the artists Joe Average and Anna Banana, as we do the writers Darrel J. McLeod, Roy Miki, Stan Persky and Maria Tippett.

From the world of sports, we honour the memory of curling's Tim Horrigan, baseball's Kaye Kaminishi, sprinters Peter Ogilvie and Joyce Yakubowich, and Gerry James, who played both hockey and football.

From the worlds of medicine and science, we mourn dermatologist Dr. Alastair Carruthers and sports medicine's Dr. Jack Taunton, as we also mourn psychologist Sue Johnson.

From the media, we remember Glenn Baglo, Rick Cluff, George Garrett and Alden Escobido Habacon.

We mourn the passing of labour's Jessie Uppal, Bill Brassington, and Kim Novak.

We remember professors Roger Gibbins and Rebecca Warburton, as we do community educators and activists Maggie Ip and Grace Eiko Thomson.

We mourn fire captain Ron Hegedus, as we mourn those who served in the armed forces during wartime, as did John Hillman, Bill Cameron, Kenneth Lett and Peter Goodwin Chance.

We mourn significant leaders who have made an indelible mark on our country:

Former Premier John Horgan, who guided us through a global pandemic, and also former prime minister Brian Mulroney, who strengthened our trading relationship with the United States.

We honour the memory of former members of Parliament from British Columbia, John Fraser and Charles (Chuck) Strahl.

And we mourn other members who served in this legislature: Dan Coulter, Anthony (Tony) Brummet, Russell Fraser, Gerard Janssen, Dennis MacKay, Shannon O'Neill, and Bob Williams.

We mourn—and reflect on—the loss of so many British Columbians from toxic drugs.

And we mourn those who lost their lives on the job.

To all who lost a loved one in the past year, we extend our sympathies and condolences. We acknowledge and share your grief.

STANDING STRONG FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

We open this first session of British Columbia's 43rd Parliament at the most consequential time for our province since the Second World War.

In the face of an unprecedented and unjustified threat to our economy, British Columbians are joining with all Canadians to fight back.

We've come together to support each other and stand up for our country.

We are saying with one united voice:

We will never be the 51st state. Not now or ever.

Instead, we will take our destiny into our own hands – by building on our strengths.

During its first four weeks, the new United States presidential administration has taken our country on a roller-coaster ride.

And we must be prepared for this to continue for the next four years.

The historic bond between Canada and the United States has been strained in profound ways.

Trust has been broken and will not easily be repaired.

No matter what the future has in store, one thing has been made clear:

We will not leave our future success to the whims of unpredictable forces from beyond our borders.

Or leave people here to fend for themselves.

We are at a crossroads. The journey ahead will not be easy.

But there is nowhere better positioned to weather the storm and come out the other side stronger than right here in British Columbia.

B.C. is an extraordinary place.

Our province has everything we need to succeed:

a strong economy supported by many different industries;

abundant natural resources and clean energy the world needs; and

our most important strength of all – the people who call this extraordinary place home.

The people of B.C. are hardworking, highly skilled and resilient.

This is who we are.

Throughout history, British Columbians have risen to meet the moment.

When Britain stood alone in Europe against the Nazis, Churchill made a desperate appeal for more military equipment.

British Columbia answered the call.

At the outset of the Second World War, fewer than 1,000 British Columbians worked in the shipyards.

By 1943, that workforce was greater than 30,000.

The shipyard in North Vancouver produced nearly half of all cargo ships delivering Allied supplies and raw goods to the front lines.

On Sea Island in Richmond, workers – many of them women – built the fuselages for B-29 Superfortress bombers and amphibious aircraft for shore patrols.

By the war's end, more than 90,000 men and 26,000 women from B.C. had enlisted.

This was the highest rate of participation in the country.

In peacetime, British Columbians have worked together to welcome the world to our home.

During Expo 86, the 2010 Winter Olympics and the recent Invictus Games.

And we're preparing to do it again for the men's FIFA World Cup next year.

B.C. is a place where we get big things done.

We build dams to harness nature's awesome strength to power our homes and industries.

We build highways on the side of mountains.

We are a province of entrepreneurs and risk takers.

We are leaders in partnership with First Nations, underlining our commitment to meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

We protect our land, air, and water.

And we take action to tackle climate change, while we grow our economy.

STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY AT HOME TO CREATE GOOD JOBS

Today, we are called on to summon that strength and character one more time.

To summon the courage to do things differently, to chart our own course.

Your government is working quickly to reorient itself to a fundamentally changed landscape.

Including reviewing programs and spending to ensure they address today's challenges.

Difficult times, such as this, call for action that is both thoughtful and tough.

British Columbia's strategy has three components:

strengthening and growing our economy;

diversifying our trading relationships; and

responding firmly and forcefully if required.

First and foremost, we will strengthen our economy to be more agile and durable.

In the best traditions of our province, people of different backgrounds and perspectives are coming together in a common purpose.

A new coalition of leaders in business, labour unions and First Nations are partnering with government.

Together, we are executing a made-in-B.C. plan.

To speed up permitting and regulatory approvals.

To train the next generation of skilled tradespeople.

To attract private capital, while expanding our electricity production.

To support emerging industries, from technology to life sciences.

And to increase manufacturing opportunities.

This is particularly important for our hard-hit forestry sector.

Adding more value to every tree harvested, as BC Timber Sales is reformed to ensure it is responsive to this challenge.

Working together to grow a stronger, more self-sufficient economy here at home is our top priority.

To unlock the incredible potential here in British Columbia, your government is expediting an initial 18 major projects.

They include natural gas and clean energy, as well as critical mineral and mining projects worth \$20 billion in investment.

Twelve of them are majority First Nations-owned.

These projects are estimated to create more than 8,000 jobs and support families, especially in northern and rural communities.

Late last year, the green light was given to nine new clean-energy projects, which will boost BC Hydro's current electricity supply by 8 per cent – enough to power 500,000 homes.

This will generate between \$5 billion and \$6 billion in private capital spending throughout the province, creating 2,000 jobs annually during construction.

And eight of the nine successful clean-energy projects will have 51 per cent First Nations equity ownership.

To get this essential electricity online faster, new wind-power projects will be exempt from the environmental assessment process.

Prioritizing efficiency and regulating in a way that makes sense, while continuing to ensure our high standards are met.

A stable supply of clean and affordable electricity is essential to power economic growth, while protecting our land and water for our children.

This session, legislation will be introduced to allow the BC Energy Regulator to act as the “one window” for permits necessary to support the North Coast Transmission Line.

In addition to other important electricity transmission projects, new wind and solar.

The BC Energy Regulator has shown success at getting projects moving quickly, while maintaining strong standards.

This will ensure we build the line sooner and in partnership with First Nations along the route.

Your government will eliminate unnecessary red tape and break down barriers to growth.

Good progress has been made in housing, where B.C. is breaking down barriers preventing the construction of middle-class homes.

And we’re making progress in mining, where major project-review timelines have been reduced by more than 35 per cent.

Now, we are accelerating that work, while applying those lessons to other sectors, such as construction, forestry and agriculture.

All of which are foundational to our success as a province.

Every minister has been given marching orders to speed up permit approvals to get job-creating projects built, in partnership with First Nations, communities and businesses throughout the province.

Beyond natural resources and our strength in new technologies, our province is home to one of the busiest film and TV production centres in North America.

Budget 2025 will include increased tax credits to ensure our province remains a destination of choice for filmmakers in Canada and around the globe, while employing B.C.’s world-class, skilled film crews.

This highly anticipated change is already attracting new production deals.

DIVERSIFYING OUR TRADING RELATIONSHIPS

As we grow our economy and build here at home, we will diversify to whom we sell our products around the world.

That means expanding and strengthening our business relationships with countries in Asia, Europe and beyond.

Here again, British Columbia is extremely well positioned.

As the West Coast gateway to Asia and major global centres, our ports are some of the busiest in Canada.

We are less exposed to the U.S. market than other provinces.

But we know more needs to be done.

Your government will upgrade transportation infrastructure, improve supply chains and make sure businesses have ample industrial land.

This is crucial to stay competitive on the world stage and reach new markets efficiently.

New trade missions will help B.C. businesses build strong economic partnerships around the world.

We will also break down trade barriers within Canada.

British Columbia has led the way on this front for years, most recently by securing a deal for our wineries to sell directly to customers in Alberta.

Discussions are also underway with Alberta for greater co-operation and alignment on a range of issues.

Underpinning this work is an imperative to stay strong and united as a country through uncertainty with the United States.

The bottom line is this:

It should not be easier to buy and sell with Washington State than with our Canadian friends and neighbours.

This must change. And change it will.

RESPONDING TO THREATS FIRMLY AND FORCEFULLY

While we grow and strengthen our economy, the threat to our sovereignty remains.

We stand strong and united.

As a country, Canada must be prepared to fight back, if necessary, to prevent a trade war.

British Columbia is thoughtfully and directly making the case against tariffs to our many friends in the United States.

A tariff war would be devastating to families on both sides of the border.

Tariffs, on top of softwood lumber duties, would increase the price of homes for Americans.

A tax on our food exports would mean more expensive groceries at the checkout for working families in the United States.

Your government is using all channels available to convince American decision-makers we are better as a team.

We are better when we work together and focus on areas of shared concern for both countries, including border security and toxic drugs, such as fentanyl.

Too many people in both our countries have lost loved ones to the toxic drug crisis.

Just like Americans, our hearts are filled with rage at the predators who move precursor chemicals and lethal drugs into our country.

Your government is eager to work with other jurisdictions in going after the transnational criminal organizations trafficking in death.

Building on our efforts to stop gangs by taking away their fast cars and fancy homes.

B.C. will also continue treating addiction as a health issue – connecting people to treatment and taking new steps to provide secure care for people struggling with brain injuries, mental illness and severe addiction.

These issues must be priorities for all governments in North America but should not be used as a pretext for destructive tariffs.

As a country, Canada must be ready to fight back, if necessary.

B.C. will respond to any economic attack on our families, firmly and forcefully, as part of a united Team Canada effort.

We will never back down from defending workers, farmers, businesses and livelihoods here in British Columbia and across Canada.

This is not a fight we started. This is not a fight we want. But we won't ever roll over or let our guard down.

DELIVERING ON KITCHEN-TABLE PRIORITIES

Through turbulent times that included a pandemic, B.C.'s economy has performed well.

We've created 250,000 jobs in the past seven years, with the strongest hourly wage growth in the country.

Last year, we had the biggest GDP growth among large provinces and one of the lowest unemployment rates.

Our debt-to-GDP ratio is less than half of Ontario's or Quebec's, and we have the highest credit rating of any province.

But a strong economy is not just about GDP numbers or quarterly reports.

It's about generating the wealth necessary to make us all better off.

To create good jobs with paycheques that keep pace with the cost of living.

In short, it's about delivering in tangible ways on the challenges people worry about at their kitchen table.

In this way, economic and social progress go hand in hand.

When we make childcare more affordable and available, we help expand the labour market by ensuring more parents can enter or re-enter the workforce.

That's what we've done here in B.C. by cutting childcare bills in half, saving parents an average of nearly \$8,000 every year.

When we deliver more homes people can afford, we help those working in the retail, construction and service sectors live closer to their jobs.

During the next 10 years, experts expect B.C.'s Homes for People plan to deliver 300,000 new middle-class homes.

And it's starting to make a difference right now. Rents are finally going down, more new rentals than ever are being built, and construction is going strong.

When we hire teachers and build modern schools, we help students get a good start in life, preparing them for an ever-changing workforce.

When we build roads, highways and public transit, we help make workers more productive by getting them to their jobs and back to loved ones, faster.

This session, new legislation will be introduced to get those and other critical infrastructure projects built faster to keep our economy moving.

When we expand skills training, we help people get ahead and businesses attract the talent they need to thrive.

To that end, your government will work closely with industry, labour and post-secondary institutions to create faster and easier pathways to get in-demand skills in the trades.

Creating new opportunities for mid-career workers and young people that grow the middle class, support business expansion and strengthen our workforce's productivity.

Ultimately, we know we cannot claim our economy is truly working unless it is working for everyone.

For too long, people have been taken advantage of and left behind by powerful interests.

Rampant speculation has put homeownership and rent out of reach for many working families.

Gouging, on top of global inflation, has driven up the cost of daily essentials.

Your government will take new actions to safeguard people who work hard and play by the rules.

This session, laws will be introduced to protect British Columbians from credit-card fraud, unfair practices by cellphone companies and to recover health-care costs from wrongdoers.

B.C. will maintain our leading work to make sure the housing market works for ordinary people.

Not those keeping homes empty or flipping them for a quick profit.

Keeping everyday costs low for working families will continue to be a top priority – from locking in savings on car insurance to putting money back into people's pockets.

Our work to strengthen enforcement and intervention services to build safer, stronger communities will be a key focus.

Here in B.C., we're adding more police officers, and we're establishing teams of prosecutors and probation officers to stop repeat violent criminals from reoffending.

The success of British Columbians is at the centre of your government's economic plan.

One that works for every person, in every community throughout the province.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

A strong and growing economy is necessary to protect and improve the public services families rely on.

Especially health care.

There is no greater expression of who we are as Canadians than our universal public health-care system.

Providing life-saving care for everyone, without taking out a credit card.

But like many places, British Columbia is feeling the strain of worker shortages and a rising demand for care.

Communities are growing, people are getting older and sicker, and many doctors and nurses are retiring.

Your government is responding by adding more nurses and family doctors, opening more community clinics and building more hospitals than ever.

In the past two years, British Columbia has connected hundreds of thousands of people to a primary-care provider. More are being connected every day.

And yet, we know there is so much more we need to do.

Your government will work with regulatory colleges to ensure trained health-care workers from other countries have their credentials recognized faster.

That includes attracting the best and brightest medical professionals from the United States who are already drawn to the benefits of our public health-care system.

The challenges also require changing the way we do things.

B.C. has taken action that allows doctors to spend more time with their patients.

Since the scope of practice for pharmacists was expanded, people are getting prescriptions for minor ailments and free contraception quicker and more easily.

We've tripled the number of nurse practitioners in the province. Many are now taking patients in their own primary-care clinics.

THE TRUE NORTH STRONG AND FREE

While the recent threats from the U.S. administration have felt like a betrayal, they have awoken something powerful in Canadians.

You can see it everywhere you go.

People are considering their choices carefully.

When planning the next vacation, they're choosing to travel locally.

At the grocery store, they're looking for a "made in Canada" or "BuyBC" logo.

We are all saying with one unified voice: our country is not for sale.

Canadians and Americans have always been good friends.

In many cases, we're family.

We share the longest undefended border in the world, and a partnership that has benefited both countries for more than 150 years.

Ours is a bond forged in battle.

We stormed the beaches at Normandy together on D-Day, fighting to liberate Europe from fascism.

For generations, our soldiers have died, cried and celebrated victory beside each other.

Together, we have looked to the stars and seen U.S. Space Shuttle missions supported by the Canadarm, a powerful symbol of our long-standing collaboration on science and technology.

We worked together to build a highway from Dawson Creek to Alaska, with local First Nations playing an essential role as guides through difficult and remote territory.

There is much we admire about our southern neighbour.

But we will never become the 51st state.

We make our own decisions and control our own future.

Because we have followed our own path, we live longer and have a more robust social net.

Our democratic institutions are stronger, and our day-to-day lives are safer.

Canada is a place that is special.

Not because we are perfect, but because we are always striving to make progress.

We are a proud and independent country.

Proud of how we take care of each other and our neighbours.

Just as our B.C. wildfire fighters were there for the people of Los Angeles in their time of need.

Through this time of uncertainty, your government will be there to support you and your family.

As proud British Columbians and Canadians, we are called on to meet this moment.

The same way we always do: by working together and looking out for each other.

Together, we will build a stronger, more secure future.

Here in the best province in the greatest country in the world.

The true north, strong and free.



Thank you, it has been my pleasure to deliver my first throne speech in this chamber.

I send a warm welcome to the many new members who are here today for the first time.

Thanks to your families and the communities you represent for their support of your work here.

I wish you all the very best as you embark, together, in the first session of the 43rd parliament here in beautiful British Columbia.

Thank you.