



BRITISH COLUMBIA

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC

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Lieutenant-Governor

— *at the* —

Opening of the Fourth Session,

Thirty-Ninth Parliament

— *of the* —

Province of British Columbia

October 3, 2011

Fellow British Columbians. Members of the
Legislative Assembly.

Every generation speaks of its own unique place in
time—of the great forces of change bearing down
upon it.

We are facing monumental change. The economic
challenges swirling around the globe are daunting.

Your government must chart a course for
British Columbians—a course that will create
and defend jobs for families in every corner of the
province.

The magnitude of the challenges can be overwhelming.
It can be tempting to try to hide from them.

But your government is setting a different course—a
course that sees change as an opportunity.

A course of courage to make the difficult decisions and
hard choices that lie ahead.

We will draw inspiration from British Columbians.
And, in particular, from the courageous and remarkable
citizens who passed away since I last addressed you
from this chair.

We are inspired by Betty Fox. A woman who did
not surrender to the numbing pain of losing a child,
but who took her son's triumph and built it into
something people around the world could neither
predict nor resist.

We are motivated by other leaders, who gave of themselves so that we could receive a better province to pass on to others.

We join First Nations communities in honouring the memory of elders and councillors Jeff Thomas, Earl Claxton Sr., Roy Morris and Rick Jacobs.

We mourn the loss of former members of this Assembly: Mel Couvelier, Alan Williams and Frank Howard. The loss of civic leaders: Vic Jolliffe, Ike Patterson, Allan Cassidy and Irene Brock. And Canada's Official Opposition leader, Jack Layton.

We recognize those who helped protect and shape our province: former B.C. Supreme Court Justice Don Brenner, Dr. Brian Wharf, Merv Wilkinson, Jane Rogers, Yorke Edwards and Gary Bannerman.

We honour artists and cultural leaders who helped express our province's soul: Lois Smith, Jane Heffelfinger, Darshan Gill, David Y.H. Lui and Eric Nicol.

We remember Rick Rypien, a young man whose passing reminds us that the tragedy of mental illness is indiscriminate about who it touches.

We recognize the passing of 42 B.C. public service employees.

And we honour the paramedics, police officers, fire fighters and members of the Canadian Forces who put their lives on the line for us everyday.

PUTTING FAMILIES FIRST

Fellow British Columbians, change is an ever-constant. Since I last addressed you, change has come to your government as well.

New leadership and a new point of view which seeks to partner with British Columbians and build on the strong, stable foundation built over the last 10 years.

This leadership is grounded in respect for taxpayers, concern for our environment and a commitment to a prosperous, entrepreneurial economy that can sustain a caring, generous and ambitious society.

Your government has brought forward a family lens through which decisions are made—decisions to preserve and strengthen the economy, the environment and our social programs for the sake of the families who depend on them.

Families of all kinds: large and small; same sex; culturally diverse; foster families and adopted children; new Canadians coming to a new world; a single mother caring for her young daughter; a son caring for his aging father.

Families are the first educators and the first line of healing and protection. They are where we turn when times are tough and when we seek inspiration.

Families can extend beyond bloodlines, to one's support network of friends and mentors. How we define them is a personal choice.

Families instil character and make good citizens.
And good citizens make a great province and a great country.

With families at the heart of decision making, the government has taken steps to help make life a little more affordable.

The minimum wage is being raised across British Columbia. The second increase in the wage will take place on November 1st. By May 2012, British Columbia's minimum wage will have increased by over 25 per cent.

Your government has made visiting our spectacular provincial parks more affordable. Parking fees have been eliminated.

Non-profit groups provide a helping hand and critical services to families. Earlier this year, your government injected an additional \$15 million into gaming grant funding to non-profit organizations across the province.

An independent review to ensure ongoing stability has engaged hundreds of groups and citizens, and is nearing conclusion.

Planned rate hikes by B.C. Hydro have been reviewed and will be reduced by half. Your government has taken a hard look at B.C. Hydro's operations to ensure it meets its critical role as a generator of reliable, renewable and affordable power.

The government will take a similarly hard look at all Crown Corporations, starting in January, to ensure taxpayers and families are protected and the interests of all British Columbians are well served.

We also await a report on the operations of B.C. Ferries from the Ferry Commissioner. The government's response to the Commissioner's report will be informed by consultations and engagement with coastal communities.

The government is also taking steps to make our province an even better place to live.

Family Day will be inscribed in calendars across British Columbia, joining three other provinces with holidays in February celebrating families.

Given our economic circumstances, B.C.'s employers will need time to adjust to this new statutory holiday. Therefore, the first B.C. *Family Day* will fall on February 18th, 2013.

B.C.'s recreational facilities are important to families and healthy lifestyles. The government is making a \$30 million investment to communities around B.C. to improve their recreational infrastructure. Recreational facilities are more than just bricks and mortar—they are where communities come together.

Despite challenging times, arts and culture funding was restored, recognizing its value to communities. Arts and cultural groups are B.C.'s storytellers, who bring our province to life.

British Columbia's creativity resides in all corners of our province. And technology can help unleash it.

A new telecommunications agreement makes possible fibre-optic connectivity in more than 450 schools across B.C., leading to improved opportunities for students to learn in the online world.

Cellular coverage on highways across the province will also be enhanced, just remember to talk hands-free.

Ninety-seven per cent of British Columbia will be connected to the internet, meaning more of rural B.C. will have access to online services and be able to participate in the online economy.

Transit is also fundamental to connecting our citizens. Communities north of the Fraser River have been waiting too long for the development of the Evergreen Line SkyTrain extension.

Your government is committing \$583 million to funding the Evergreen Line, which will relieve congestion, improve air quality and link Port Moody and Coquitlam to the SkyTrain system. Over 8,000 direct and indirect jobs will be created during construction.

B.C. is ready to build and we await the decision of the Mayors' Council to confirm its share of the funding.

These actions are the beginning of what change looks like in British Columbia, but they are far from the end.

The government has an important role in providing sustainable services that families rely upon, and in providing assistance to citizens who do not have family to support them.

Of course, these services depend on a strong economy that generates ample revenues. But it takes more than money to provide quality services—it also takes innovative approaches.

With us today are two of the *2011 Premier's Public Service Award* winners; public servants who drive innovation everyday in the important work they do.

Ramona Soares serves the province in the Worker Advisor's Office. Her team is dedicated to ensuring injured workers are treated fairly.

Together, her team has developed an early-dispute intervention that not only improves how injured workers are treated, but has saved taxpayers close to half-a-million dollars in just four years.

Cheryl McLay is a Regional Manager for the Vancouver Island Coast region in the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation.

Through her efforts, Cheryl has helped the communities she works with raise \$2 million in new capital for economic development and community improvement projects in just the past two years.

These remarkable achievements are indicative of the high calibre of B.C.'s public service.

CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES

This summer, citizens voted in a referendum. The result of that vote is being acted upon. The people have spoken and British Columbia is moving forward.

The government has committed to return to the former tax system, responsibly and as quickly as possible.

The government will also review the provincial tax system to ensure it supports job growth and innovation, the results of which will be considered for Budget 2012.

We live in a time of financial instability on a global scale, with challenges to manage here at home. We are not an island in today's economy.

This year, British Columbia's economy is expected to grow, but at a modest rate and below the expectations of just a few months ago. Revenues are expected to be smaller than forecast.

Two years ago, the government set a net zero mandate for public sector labour negotiations. Working with B.C.'s public sector labour leadership, the government secured agreements covering the majority of employees.

At that time, it was hoped by both sides the global economy would rebound; that stronger economic growth would take place providing greater financial flexibility.

However, in the past six weeks, forecasts for the Canadian, American and Euro-zone economies have signalled a continued slowdown in consumer spending and overall growth.

These developments have a direct impact on the government treasury. They mean the fiscal situation is significantly more challenged than was envisioned during the last round of collective bargaining.

While government continues to hold negotiations with the B.C. Teachers Federation based on the previous mandate, we have also begun to turn our minds to the contracts that expire in the spring of 2012.

Though taxpayer-funded public sector wage increases will be challenging to achieve, and must fit within the fiscal plan, your government understands that public servants need to be treated fairly.

This requires being creative in how resources are identified for any improvements in collective agreements.

Therefore, the government will facilitate a process for collective agreement improvements by working with ministries and employer groups to find savings through cooperative gains.

The government will be asking public sector employers, unions and employees to join in this process.

DEFENDING AND CREATING JOBS

Maintaining our province's hard-earned status as a safe harbour for investment is critical to our central mission — defending and creating jobs.

In British Columbia, fiscal prudence and one of most competitive tax regimes in North America have inspired confidence and preserved our province's triple A credit rating.

Our province's fundamentals are solid and we have many unique advantages:

- a highly skilled and educated workforce;
- an abundance of energy and natural resources;
- leadership in emerging, green technologies; and
- our proximity to Asia.

Canada Starts Here: The BC Jobs Plan builds on these advantages.

From Aboriginal youth hungry to seize opportunity, to Asian and South Asian communities who have helped build our province for more than a century, our diversity is a key economic asset for British Columbia.

The BC Jobs Plan recognizes this historic strength. It is built on three pillars.

The first pillar is enabling job creation. The government recognizes it has a responsibility to lead the way, but at times needs to get out of the way to accelerate job creation.

A *Major Investments Office* will be created to work with investors to take projects on paper and make them a reality.

A *Jobs and Investment Board* will be up and running in 50 days to hold government's feet to the fire, clearing the way for job creation while continuing to monitor key economic and social indicators.

The government is investing \$24 million across our natural resource ministries over two years in order to eliminate the backlog in key authorizations that are preventing projects from proceeding.

The second pillar of *The BC Jobs Plan* is making sure the right connections are in place through investments in smart infrastructure. Building Canada's Pacific Gateway will continue to be a massive project performed hand-in-hand with local governments and with the federal government.

Our province has a special duty to ensure that marine ports and airports linking Canada to Asia and the rest of world are the best they can be. The government is making significant new investments at the Port of Prince Rupert and at Deltaport.

We will sustain our partnership through continued investment with the federal government's *Building Canada Fund*, and work with them to design future infrastructure improvement programs.

But our gateway is more than roads, rail and ports. It is people. We will be a catalyst sparking new

relationships and strengthening human connections overseas.

The government is developing an international education strategy to increase enrolment of foreign students by 50 per cent over 4 years, adding \$500 million to our provincial economy.

We will also work with the federal government to attract more entrepreneurs and workers through the *Skilled Worker Program* and the *Provincial Nominee Program*.

The third pillar of *The BC Jobs Plan* is about opening up markets for B.C. goods and resources.

Your government recognizes the historic opportunity provided by liquefied natural gas exports. We are committed to enabling the development and operation of three LNG terminals by 2020, with sufficient sources of electricity to make it possible.

British Columbia's story must be told in markets that matter. British Columbians are modest about success, but we cannot take it too far and be the world's best-kept secret.

The government will double its trade presence in places like China and India. We will reach out to help B.C. companies entering Asian markets. And we will be better equipped to welcome foreign investors through a new hosting and business development program.

The Premier will also lead a provincial trade mission to India and China this fall, to build and strengthen relationships forged over the past decade and identify opportunities for the next.

Opening markets has real impacts for our citizens. It means new jobs at a sawmill in Quesnel and new mining jobs in Princeton. It means students from China studying in Nanaimo and clean-energy solutions developed in Metro Vancouver improving the quality of life in cities in India.

These pillars stand on a foundation of sound fiscal management and a skilled B.C. workforce able to meet the demands of our economy.

Education and skills training should allow each British Columbian to earn a living in their own town. We are establishing Regional Workforce Tables with seats for community, industry, First Nations and labour representatives to collaborate.

And the government will ensure resources dedicated to labour market and training programs are targeted to meet regional and industry needs.

As B.C. grows, there is tremendous opportunity for the skills of young people to grow with it. While we welcome workers from other provinces, our first priority is to fill jobs with British Columbians.

By putting these measures into action, *The BC Jobs Plan* seeks to make British Columbia one of the top two Canadian provinces in both GDP and job growth by 2015.

Semi-annual reports will chart our progress. These reports will reflect engagement with British Columbians.

Your government is also committed to sustaining its leadership in the fight against climate change, and maintaining clean air and clean water throughout our province.

B.C.'s revenue-neutral carbon tax accelerates the transition to cleaner fuels and technologies, and reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

All funds collected through the carbon tax are returned to British Columbians—citizens and businesses—through a range of tax relief.

As we look beyond 2012, we will consider next steps in our clean energy and environmental strategies, in partnership with communities, industry, First Nations, non-government organizations and, most importantly, citizens.

Your government sees the economic benefits of clean technology as part of a diverse economy. We will look at the larger picture and consider how tax policy, energy policy, incentive programs and new technology contribute to a renewed vision for B.C.'s green economy.

Our strategy will be grounded in pragmatic, cooperative solutions that protect our economic competitiveness and spur regional development.

The government also embraces strategic partnerships to help drive *The BC Jobs Plan* forward. Our constructive

relationships with the federal government, our New West partners in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and our neighbours in the Pacific Northwest will yield many opportunities.

And partnerships with First Nations are poised to unleash major economic benefits for British Columbia and increase capacity and opportunity in Aboriginal communities.

Your government will focus attention on establishing agreements with First Nations that will create certainty over our respective responsibilities. And while treaties may be an option for some First Nations, there are many ways to reach agreements that can benefit all communities—Aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike.

To further improve the investment climate, your government will work with First Nations to create a new business and investment council to foster wealth-creating partnerships.

The gap between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal British Columbia remains too wide and too deep. New economic partnerships will contribute to our shared goals of family and community stability, bringing new opportunities and hope for young people.

SERVICES FOR B.C. FAMILIES

Working to develop and implement a jobs plan with all British Columbians exists for one reason—to support and strengthen families.

It is vitally important to be able to provide services and supports that families need and our society's most vulnerable citizens can count on.

Modernizing Education

In British Columbia, we are fortunate to have thousands of dedicated teachers in our elementary, middle and high schools. Day in and day out, they prepare our children for their future and, in turn, the future prosperity of our province.

Over the coming year, your government will act to improve the education system, provide supports to teachers and improve student safety in the classroom.

Students need skills that will allow them to adapt to a world that is changing more quickly than ever before. These skills can be taught by our teachers, but not using a 20th century curriculum with 20th century teaching methods.

Over the coming weeks, my government will introduce a series of important changes to improve the skills of our current teachers and ensure that future teachers are provided with the tools they need to produce first-class graduates.

Because teachers make the difference between good students and great students, our government will dedicate funding to address issues of class composition in British Columbia.

Today, school boards and parents are seeking additional flexibility and choice when it comes to educating our students to provide an education second to none. These changes will be bold and represent a significant improvement in how, when and where education takes place.

They are necessary, now more than ever.

The government is also committed to safer schools and will ensure that those very few individuals who abuse their positions of trust are removed and not permitted to return.

And important anti-bullying policies in our schools will be expanded to include a comprehensive training regime, on-line reporting tools and advanced threat assessment tools and protocols.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Complex social issues confront every government in every jurisdiction across the world.

Since 2003, British Columbia's child poverty rate has declined almost 38 per cent. The government shares the aspirations of all British Columbians to eliminate poverty and other adverse social conditions.

The government has expanded StrongStart programs and full-day kindergarten, and introduced a

nurse home-visitation program to support young, low-income, first-time mothers.

The government funds more than 99,000 child care spaces and provides child care subsidies for about 54,000 children a year. Over 16,000 new affordable-housing units have been created with 5,000 more either planned or under construction.

Rental supplements support about 9,000 B.C. families, and nearly three-quarters of a million British Columbians received MSP premium assistance this year.

Community Living British Columbia delivers high-quality services to almost 14,000 adults with developmental disabilities. There is a growing budget and growing demand.

The government recognizes the importance of these services provided by CLBC to families across B.C. and is focused on finding solutions to meet their needs.

The government is actively engaged with the non-profit sector through the Government Non-Profit Initiative. We will consider innovative next steps by hosting a summit on social innovation in November with non-profit organizations.

With increased movement of Aboriginal people into urban centres comes the opportunity to strengthen and align our efforts with urban Aboriginal communities.

The government will work with Aboriginal partners, the federal government and local governments to develop an off-reserve Aboriginal action plan to achieve better education and job training, healthier family life, and strengthened cultures and traditions.

Healthy Communities

Our health care system is a rock on which families rely. It is also a resource that is adjusting to the impacts of our changing, aging society.

While the health system is changing, your government is committed to making sure the principles underlying it never do. Over the past few years, the government has made significant investments in health care infrastructure.

Major hospital expansions have recently opened in Victoria, Fort St. John and Vernon. Significant investments are currently underway in Nanaimo, Kelowna, Nelson, Prince George and Vancouver.

In Surrey, we saw the opening of the brand new Jim Pattison Outpatient Care and Surgical Centre this past May, and are witnessing the largest single health care capital investment in British Columbia with the expansion of Surrey Memorial Hospital.

Since 2001, over \$7 billion has been invested in health care infrastructure. And over the next three years, a further \$1.9 billion is allocated to improve facilities across B.C.

This is the largest health care infrastructure investment plan in the history of our province.

And while the physical infrastructure is improving, more work remains to improve the health of our citizens.

The government has identified four key strategies to improve the health and well being of British Columbians.

- Prevention
- Family Practice and Community Care
- Hospital Care and Safety
- Efficiency

These four strategies are the foundation upon which we will improve the provision and access of health care in B.C.

Under the Prevention strategy early actions include a sodium-reduction campaign and an informed-dining program which will partner with restaurants to provide more transparent nutritional information.

The strategy also includes a new tobacco-cessation program, providing smokers who want to kick the habit with cessation products free of charge. This program came into force last week and, already, many hundreds of citizens have signed up.

The Family Practice and Community Care strategy involves finding family doctors for all British Columbians who wish one, by 2015. It means that seniors will be able to receive more consistent care

from medical professionals who know them and their history.

New partnerships with the BC Medical Association are creating groups of family doctors to reduce gaps for patients and provide new clinical training for family physicians.

The Hospital Care and Safety strategy is about achieving better services, in part, through the construction of new innovative hospitals where families can be more involved with loved ones' care and where health providers can provide better service.

It is also about improved clinical care guidelines—safeguards to improve medical care safety and ensure the right medication is provided to the right patient.

The fourth strategy, Efficiency, is designed to ensure we get the best return for every dollar. By applying *Lean Design* principles in our hospitals, we have seen improved workflows and reduced costs.

And a patient-focused funding initiative has resulted in lower costs per procedure as hospitals and staff become more efficient.

Over the past five years, annual health care spending has risen by \$4.4 billion—a 36 per cent increase. This provides vastly improved services and equipment, but pressures remain.

Seven years ago, the federal government and provinces came together to create a long-term sustainable health accord that focused funding on measurable targets.

In January 2012, our Premier will host a meeting of Premiers from across Canada to discuss how the renewal of the federal accord can help sustain our public health care system and drive innovation.

Just as your government is leading the way in finding innovation in health care, we will lead our country towards a renewed federal health accord.

Safer Communities

Between 2000 and 2009, the rate of violent and property crime in British Columbia declined by 27 per cent. Despite this declining rate, many British Columbians lack confidence in our criminal justice system.

They have said they want a system that responds more quickly when a crime has been committed—a system that is more accessible and more adaptable to emerging issues.

Your government shares this desire and is acting upon it.

To add capacity to the courts, the government will introduce legislation to relax restrictions that limit the service time of senior part-time judges.

And under the *Provincial Court Act*, retired judges will be reappointed on the recommendation of the Judicial Council of B.C. to provide surge capacity.

Following an exciting and unifying playoff run by the Vancouver Canucks, the Stanley Cup riot was a dark stain on our province.

The actions of rioters were disgraceful, particularly in contrast to the community spirit exhibited by thousands of citizens who helped the city recover in the days and weeks that followed.

This breakdown in civil order requires that justice be done, and that it also be seen to be done. A dedicated team of Crown Counsel is in place to swiftly process all Stanley Cup riot charges and ensure that justice is served.

The government also respectfully asks and has requested Crown Counsel to advocate for television and radio access to the courts during proceedings for those charged in relation to the Stanley Cup riot.

More can also be done to improve access to the judicial system by diverting certain types of proceedings from the courts. The following actions will be taken:

- The government will introduce the new *Family Law Act* during this session, to promote early resolution of family law problems.
- The government will also bring forward legislation in this session to create a streamlined process for traffic fine violations that resolves disputes and frees up provincial court time.

The government is also moving forward on other important justice and policing matters.

A new Independent Investigation Office that will investigate police-related incidents involving deaths or

serious harm is on track and will be operational in the first half of 2012.

Destruction to infrastructure and property due to metal theft will be targeted through new legislation regulating scrap metal sales.

And the government is committed to good faith negotiations with the federal government with respect to the RCMP contract in British Columbia.

OPEN GOVERNMENT

The world is changing constantly. We use technology in ways we could not have imagined just a few years ago. Citizens' expectations are changing the way people interact with their government and the way they expect to receive services.

Our government is committed to openness, transparency and engaging with British Columbians. Simply put: we need to be open with the information people have a right to see and open to ideas they have a right to voice.

In June, our government launched several initiatives to increase openness and transparency. British Columbia is the first province in Canada to launch an open data website, releasing 2,500 datasets in formats that allow anyone to license and use the information.

Our government is also proactively releasing freedom of information responses. And a new government

website is making it easier for families to find the services they need.

However, further changes are needed to allow government service delivery to keep up with technology while respecting peoples' right to privacy.

This fall, the government will be introducing changes to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The Act was written in 1992, when many of us were still using electric typewriters.

The amendments will take the work already underway and enshrine our commitments to openness and transparency into law.

By modernizing the Act, your government will enable citizens to have more seamless access to government services and create the conditions for greater engagement with other citizens.

And the new provisions include additional authority for the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ensure that what we design is done in a way that enhances and is respectful of privacy.

Openness and transparency is important for all levels of government. Your government will be introducing legislation to create an office of the Municipal Auditor General.

The Municipal Auditor General will support existing open and transparent processes, be a resource for local government and ensure the public knows they are getting value for their tax dollars.

Open government is also about listening and engaging with people we serve. Our government has taken significant actions to open the lines of communication with citizens and those efforts will expand.

The BC Jobs Plan is an important part—but only one part—of our open government and engagement efforts.

Reviewing gaming grant funding and a summit with non-profit organizations are other examples. The government will also continue to promote the use of the Legislature's Select Standing Committees as venues for government and opposition to find common ground.

The Select Standing Committee on Health has been mandated to look at the impact of demographic change on our health care system, and a bi-partisan committee seeks the best solutions for regulating cosmetic pesticide use.

The government will continue to engage citizens through town halls in communities around B.C.

In the coming months, a new web space will be launched where British Columbians can see and access all the consultations and engagements underway across government.

Our citizens and their knowledge are among of our greatest resources. By working together, we can use our collective experience and wisdom to find solutions that benefit more people and achieve far more than by working alone.

And to get in the spirit, I invite citizens to go on Twitter today and make their own contribution at *#throne2011*. In 140 characters or less, tell your government about the kind of B.C. you want for your family.

Fellow British Columbians, your government has charted a course to help prepare our province for the new and challenging realities of our time.

The history of British Columbia reveals itself through our written records and the traditions of storytelling—accounts and stories of everyday people overcoming great obstacles and making great progress.

Together we write this new chapter.

We will not lose sight of shared goals—supporting job creation, defending the jobs we have, protecting the environment and providing support and protection for the most vulnerable among us.

Your government is committed to change, committed to improving life for British Columbia’s wonderful and diverse families and committed to open government.

Your government will face the challenges ahead, with humility and respect for its citizens, and with optimism and confidence for the future.

Thank you.