

BRIEFING NOTE

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

“A STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT CANADA”,

THE PRIME MINISTER’S STATEMENT AND OPPOSITION PARTIES RESPONSES

September 23, 2020

ISSUE

On September 23, the Governor-General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Julie Payette, delivered the Speech from the Throne. This speech, written by Government, lays out the agenda and focus for the upcoming legislative session. This officially opens a new session of Parliament. It is not a political speech.

Later in the day, The Prime Minister of Canada, The Honourable Justin Trudeau, gave a statement, carried by all national networks, to outline the more political pieces of the Government’s agenda and plan, all with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as the basis for actions. All opposition party leaders were given time following the Prime Minister’s statement to give responses to the Throne Speech. This “prime-time” statement and responses are not usual for Throne Speech day.

SUMMARY

At the outset of the speech, the numbers of deaths due to COVID-19 were highlighted, for Canada, the United States, and globally. This was the backdrop for the entire government agenda – to respond to and overcome the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Throne Speech identified four foundational statements that would guide the government’s actions in this parliamentary session, claiming that this is our generation’s crossroads:

- Fighting the pandemic and saving lives
- Supporting people and businesses through this crisis, as long as it lasts
- To Build Back Better to create a stronger, more resilient Canada
- Standing up for who we are Canadians.

Protecting Canadians from COVID-19

- Commitment to help provinces and territories increase their testing capacity to reduce waiting times for tests.
- Creating a federal Testing Assistance Response Team to meet surge testing needs.
- Expediting the process to approve new and faster tests and deploying them.
- Recognizing that some local public health closures may be reintroduced, the government committed to target additional financial support directly to businesses which have to temporarily shut down as a result of a local closure.

Helping Canadians through the pandemic

- Create more than one million jobs, using direct investments in the social sector, infrastructure, skills training, and incentives for employers to hire and retain workers.
- Extend the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) to next summer.

- Scaling up the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy to provide more paid work experiences in the next year.
- With the end of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and a transition to an expanded Employment Insurance, there will also be a new transitional Canada Recovery Benefit. The EI system will become the sole delivery mechanism for employment benefits, including for those who did not qualify for EI before the pandemic (self-employed and gig economy workers)
- Creation of an Action Plan for Women in the Economy, which will include accelerating the Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy, and a commitment to a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system. (The Quebec model was mentioned). The Government also committed to subsidizing before- and after-school program costs.
- In addition to extending the wage subsidy, the Government will take further steps to bridge vulnerable businesses to the other side of the pandemic by:
 - Expanding the Canada Emergency Business Account to help businesses with fixed costs
 - Improving the Business Credit Availability Program, and
 - Introducing further support for industries that have been the hardest hit, including travel and tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries like the performing arts.
- Focus on targeted investments to strengthen the middle class, build resiliency, and generate growth.
- Identify additional ways to tax extreme wealth inequality, including by concluding work to limit the stock option deduction for wealthy individuals at large, established corporations, and addressing corporate tax avoidance by digital giants.

Building Back Better – a resiliency agenda for the middle class

- Make *Criminal Code* amendments to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under their care, putting them in danger.
- Work with the provinces and territories to set new, national standards for long-term care so that seniors get the best support possible and take additional action to help people stay in their homes longer.
- Commit to increasing Old Age Security once a senior citizen turns 75, and boosting the Canada Pension Plan survivor's benefit.
- Examine further targeted measures for personal support workers, who do an essential service helping the most vulnerable in our communities.
- Will bring forward a Disability Inclusion Plan, which will have:
 - A new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors;
 - A robust employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities;
 - And a better process to determine eligibility for Government disability programs and benefits.
- The Government will ensure that everyone – including in rural and remote areas – has access to a family doctor or primary care team and expand capacity to deliver virtual health care.
- Continue to address the opioid epidemic.
- Further increases to access to mental health resources and medicines.

- The Government remains committed to a national, universal pharmacare program and will accelerate steps to achieve this system including:
 - Through a rare-disease strategy to help Canadian families save money on high-cost drugs;
 - Establishing a national formulary to keep drug prices low;
 - And working with provinces and territories willing to move forward without delay.
- Accelerate investments in shelters and transition housing and continue to advance with a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.
- Continue to invest in all types of infrastructure, including public transit, energy efficient retrofits, clean energy, rural broadband, and affordable housing, particularly for Indigenous Peoples and northern communities.
- Accelerate connectivity timelines and ambitions of the Universal Broadband Fund to ensure all Canadians, no matter where they live, have access to high-speed internet.
- Increasing investments to rapid housing in the short term and partnering with not-for-profits and co-ops and bring in enhancements to the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, including in Canada's largest cities.
- Ensure Canada's supply managed sectors receive full and fair compensation for recent trade agreements.
- Update outdated IT systems to modernize the way Government serves Canadians.

Action on Climate Change

- Ban single-use plastics next year and ensure more plastic is recycled.
- Immediately bring forward a plan to exceed Canada's 2030 climate goal and legislate Canada's goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.
- Launch a new fund to attract investments in making zero-emissions products and cut the corporate tax rate in half for these companies to create jobs.
- Create thousands of jobs retrofitting homes and buildings, cutting energy costs for Canadian families and businesses.
- Invest in reducing the impact of climate-related disasters, like floods and wildfires, to make communities safer and more resilient.
- Help deliver more transit and active transit options.
- Make zero-emissions vehicles more affordable while investing in more charging stations across the country.
- Moving forward with the Clean Power Fund, including the Atlantic Loop that will connect surplus clean power to regions transitioning away from coal.
- Support investments in renewable energy and next-generation clean energy and technology solutions.
- Support manufacturing, natural resource, and energy sectors as they work to transform to meet a net zero future.
- Recognize farmers, foresters, and ranchers as key partners in the fight against climate change, supporting their efforts to reduce emissions and build resilience.
- Modernize the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.
- Create a new Canada Water Agency to keep our water safe, clean, and well-managed and identify opportunities to build more resilient water and irrigation infrastructure.
- Look to grow Canada's ocean economy to create opportunities for fishers and coastal communities, while advancing reconciliation and conservation objectives.

The Canada we're fighting for

The Government will walk the shared path of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples by:

- Co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation and a distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategy, with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.
- Accelerating work on the National Action Plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice, as well as implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action
- Continuing to close the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities, working on a distinctions-basis with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation to accelerate the government's 10-year commitment.
- Make additional resiliency investments to meet the clean drinking water commitment in First Nations communities;
- Support additional capacity-building for First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.
- Introduce legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples before the end of this year.

To address systemic racism:

- Taking action on online hate
- Going further on economic empowerment for specific communities, and increasing diversity on procurement
- Building a whole-of-federal-government approach around better collection of disaggregated data
- Implementing an action plan to increase representation in hiring and appointments, and leadership development within the Public Service
- Taking new steps to support the artistic and economic contributions of Black Canadian culture and heritage.
- Introduce legislation and make investments that take action to address the systemic inequities in all phases of the criminal justice system, from diversion to sentencing, from rehabilitation to records
- Move forward on enhanced civilian oversight of our law enforcement agencies, including the RCMP
- Modernize training for police and law enforcement, including addressing standards around the use of force
- Move forward on RCMP reforms, with a shift toward community-led policing
- Accelerate work to co-develop a legislative framework for First Nations policing as an essential service.

BACKGROUND

- This is the 150th Speech from the Throne since Confederation.
- This is Governor-General Payette's second throne speech.
- There will be debate on the Throne Speech over the coming weeks. At the end of debate, there will be a vote of Parliament, that is a vote of confidence. If the government loses this vote, it would likely trigger a federal election.
- This fall, the Government will release an update to Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. This will outline the Government's economic and fiscal position, provide fiscal projections, and set out new measures to implement this Throne Speech.

Prime Minister's statement

An address carried by all national television outlets.

- Canada is at a crossroads. We are on the brink of a fall that could be worse than the spring. The second wave is underway, in Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. More positive cases yesterday (September 22) than on the March day when the country went into lockdown.
- Canada can get COVID under control but will take the combined actions of all Canadians. Actions today will help us 2 weeks, months down the road. We must be resilient and patient.
- “Likely we won’t be gathering for Thanksgiving, but we still have a shot a Christmas”
- Will work with the provinces and territories to establish new long-term care strategies, and to enhance testing for COVID-19
- Protecting health is the best way to help build/rebuild the economy.
- Strengthen and broaden Employment Insurance program (to replace CERB)
- In the short-term government will keep investing, to build back better.
- The pandemic has laid bare the fundamental inequalities in our country – Need to address:
 - early learning and childcare system
 - strong social supports help to build the economy
 - national pharmacare program
 - investments to eliminate chronic illnesses
- Redouble efforts to deal with climate change and to build the economy of the future. Tackling climate change is a cornerstone of the recovery plan
- Must continue efforts and progress on reconciliation and eliminate systemic racism
- Continued protections for both official languages

Conservative response from Erin O’Toole

(NOTE: The Conservatives are being speculated to vote against the government on the Throne Speech)

- In a pre-taped message, O’Toole started by saying both him and his wife have COVID-19 and stated all must be vigilant and mindful of actions to beat the pandemic.
- Says Canada is more divided than ever before
- Need jobs not fine words.
- Need to build back stronger as a country – this pandemic has shown we can only depend on ourselves during a crisis.
- Need to fast-track additional testing for COVID
- Need to deal with western alienation, especially related to natural resource development
- Practical help for small business, family business etc.
- Free trade and fair trade (called out China in particular), and wants to build new Indo-Asian markets to combat Chinese impacts

CPC MPs Candice Bergen, MP for Portage-Lisgar, Deputy Opposition Leader, and Gérard Deltell, MP for Louis-St-Laurent, Opposition House Leader provided direct comments/response for the party regarding the Throne Speech because of O'Toole's isolation.

- The Conservative Party does not support this Throne Speech
- Said that it is a “typically Liberal” plan that spends billions without any measures to pay it back, or to achieve any real results; does not do anything for resource sector employees, impedes on provincial jurisdiction especially in the areas of health care and long-term care.
- No discussion on how to control spending
- Nothing in it for Alberta, Saskatchewan nor Manitoba. This government wants to shut down the oil sector.
- Conservatives won't support another shutdown of our economy, and Canadians can't afford it.
- If there is an election, they will be ready for it.

Bloc Québécois response from Yves-François Blanchet

- Mr. Blanchett spoke while in isolation after testing positive for COVID-19
- Federal government is interfering in provincial responsibilities – i.e. health care
- Mr. Trudeau has one week to provide unconditional transfers for health care to Quebec or the Bloc will vote against the Throne Speech.

NDP response from Jagmeet Singh

(NOTE: It is anticipated and speculation is that the Government will provide the assurances requested by the NDP to secure their votes for the government on the Throne Speech)

- Recognizes that Canadians are worried about a number of things as a result of this pandemic
- COVID exposed problems, that existed before, and this Throne Speech and government have not delivered before and don't trust they will – not words, actions
- Investments to support recovery must include child-care to help women and families participate in the economy
- Need to be serious about tackling climate change
- Those who profited from this pandemic should be paying for the national response.
- NDP support depends on not reducing financial support for Canadians that cannot return to work because of COVID-19 and to implement paid sick leave for all.

WEB LINKS

[2020 Speech from the Throne](#)