

Throne speech reveals Horgan government's top priority – 'making life more affordable'

A Speech from the Throne – the ceremonial occasion which signals the beginning of a new session of British Columbia's Legislative Assembly – usually in recent years has been relatively short and generally insipid.

The speeches in 2015 and 2016, for example, clocked in at slightly fewer than 3,500 words apiece and contained banalities such as "To grow and diversify our economy, we must have the courage to say yes."

By comparison, the 2018 Throne speech – written by Premier John Horgan's seven-month old New Democratic Party government, and read in the legislature on February 13 by Lieutenant Governor Judith Guichon – ran to nearly 6,000 words and offered remarkable clarity as to the NDP's immediate priorities.

For example, shortly after beginning her remarks Guichon declared that the Horgan government's "first and most urgent priority is to make life more affordable."

Notably, the Lieutenant Governor repeated the word "affordable" no fewer than 22 times during the course of her Speech from the Throne. And when variations such as "afford" and "unaffordable" are included in the count, the total easily surpassed 30.

Here are a few notable examples:

* "British Columbians have made their priorities clear. After years of rising living costs and stagnant wages, they expect government to make life more affordable."

* "Our challenge is to increase the opportunities available to people, and give them relief and a life they can afford."

* "By making life more affordable, fixing the services people count on, and making sure B.C.'s economy is sustainable and working for everyone, government can make life better."

Not surprisingly, considering that the government still is in the first year of its mandate, the word "future" also played a key role in the Speech from the Throne, appearing no less than 17 times.

In a nutshell, the goal the Horgan New Democrats have set for themselves is to make life in the future for British Columbians more affordable, better.

Or, as was clearly stated by Guichon: "In the months and years ahead, government will do even more to make life more affordable and create opportunity for people."

So, how will that be done?

First and foremost, the NDP plans to address B.C.'s soaring home prices and shelter costs.

As Guichon intoned: "The single, greatest challenge to affordability in British Columbia is housing."

And this: "Safe, decent housing is a right that is under threat by speculators, domestic and foreign, who seek windfall profits

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Premier John Horgan greets B.C.'s Lieutenant Governor.

PHOTO CREDIT - Chad Hipolito/Canadian Press

at the expense of people who work, live and pay taxes in B.C.”

Efforts to correct the province’s skyrocketing home prices will include curbs to property speculation, legislation to crack down on money-laundering and tax fraud related to real estate, and new policies to ensure that short-term and on-line rentals – such as those offered by Airbnb – contribute “their fair share” of taxes.

And a promise for a government-led initiative to create more housing stock received considerable publicity – not too surprising given the Throne speech promise to “begin to make the largest investment in affordable housing in B.C.’s history.”

Projects are expected to include “social housing, student housing, seniors housing, Indigenous housing and affordable rentals for middle-income families.”

The Horgan government also plans to introduce this spring legislation to offer greater protection to “renters facing eviction due to renovation or demolition,” as well as to those who own or rent mobile homes.

An ambitious proposal also will see the NDP “begin making the largest investment in retrofitting and renovations of social housing in B.C. in more than 20 years.”

Workers’ incomes in decline as share of B.C.’s economy



SOURCE - .BC Stats

It is hoped that such investments will preserve the province’s housing stock, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and slash home-heating bills for residents who live in social housing.

Other initiatives promised in the Speech from the Throne:

- * updated government procurement policies to help small and provincially-owned businesses;

- * the launch this spring of the Emerging Economy Task Force, which will promote innovative and sustainable

industries;

- * action “to reduce surgical wait times”; and

- * a concerted effort will be made to “close the socio-economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.”

The Horgan government’s declaration that “affordability” is its paramount priority likely will find favour with a sizeable segment of British Columbians.

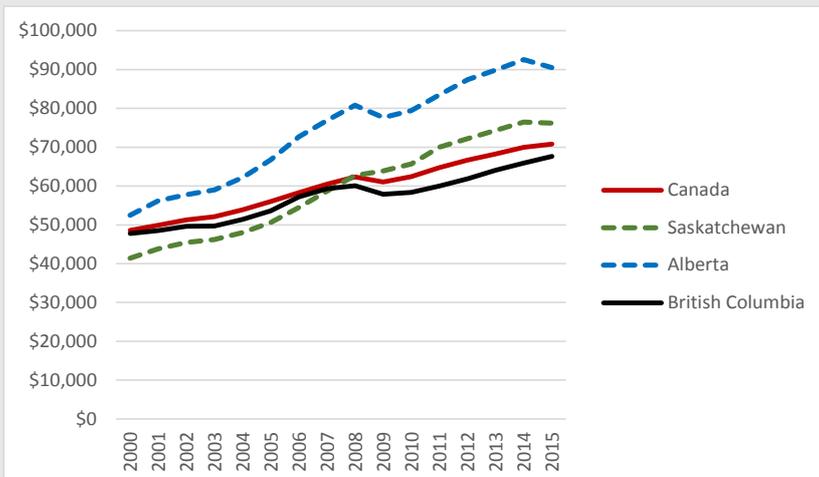
As the chart at the top of this page illustrates, the wages and salaries earned by B.C. workers have been in decline for much of the last three-and-a-half decades – at least as a share of the provincial economy.

In the early 1980s, wages and salaries represented more than 50.0 per cent of B.C.’s nominal GDP.

Twenty years later, at the beginning of the new millennium, wages and salaries were down to just under 45.0 per cent – and in 2015, the latest year for which data are available, the comparable share was just 42.1 per cent.

The second chart on the page reveals that the median employment incomes earned by B.C. families are falling ever further behind other western provinces, as well as the Canadian average.

Median employment income for B.C. families lags behind other provinces



SOURCE - .Statistics Canada