

NEWS RELEASE

British Columbia Speech from the Throne 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 10, 2010 – The BC Government delivered its Speech from the Throne on Wednesday. The Speech laid out an ambitious agenda for the coming session of the Legislature. There were several themes throughout the speech that are of relevance to the BC Chamber policy platform.

Resource Industry

The need for a vibrant resource industry was a strong theme, with the speech making the following commitments:

- A new unified process for environmental assessment (EA) and permits in BC. This will create a 'one project, one process' approach.
- A new Investment Process Review, which will identify opportunities for simplifying and expediting approval processes across government.

The speech did include one area of concern for the BC Chamber, the announcement that coal bed gas extraction, mining, oil and gas development will not be permitted in British Columbia's Flathead Valleys. A blanket ban on these activities, announced with no industry consultation, is an area of significant concern for the industry and the Chamber.

Local Government

The Speech made specific reference to a general reduction in regulation to encourage investment, and noted that local governments are a significant impediment in this regard. The speech made two specific recommendations:

Local governments will be asked to partner in endeavors that address all impediments to reasonable investment, including zoning, licensing and permitting requirements.

A joint committee on municipal property tax reform will identify specific steps to make property taxes more conducive to investment while assuring municipal services are fairly provided for all taxpayers.

The BC Chamber will be addressing this issue with some urgency.

Quasi-governmental bodies

In a move that was widely anticipated, the speech announced that the government will take a fresh look at B.C.'s regulatory regimes, including the BC Utilities Commission, BC Ferry Commission, TransLink Commission and others. The speech also stated that the government would 'fix' Translink and proceed with building the Evergreen Line.

Role of the federal government

While the provincial government's comments on the need for federal government action are not new, they were a welcome reinforcement on the importance of addressing several key impediments to our economic growth. These were:

- Reinforcing the need for the federal government to address the duplication in our EA process by having a unified federal-provincial review process. The speech stated that there are \$3 Billion worth of projects in BC held up in this process.
- Airports should be open to trade, commerce and tourism through Open Skies agreements. The speech correctly pointed out that the only reason we have not seen movement on this critical file is due to unnecessary protection for other regions at the expense of our provincial economies and jobs. Open skies would add \$800 million, and thousands of jobs, to our provincial economy.

Hints for the Budget

The new budget to be released March 2nd will set the foundation for the province we want in 2030, with a new agenda that:

- Strengthens our economy, reinforces our fiscal framework and creates new jobs;
- Capitalizes on our strategic advantage as Canada's Pacific Gateway;
- Maximizes our potential as a clean energy powerhouse and a global leader in climate action;
- Assists and supports families with children;
- Modernizes our education system and creates new opportunities for early learning, smarter use of education resources and new choices for students; and
- Expands innovation in health delivery that gives patients new choices, that rewards performance and that secures public health care for future generations.

The Speech also mentioned that budget measures will make our International Finance Centre more attractive to international investment and the establishment of head offices.

Clean Energy

The speech committed to a new comprehensive strategy to put BC at the forefront of clean energy development. A key element in this strategy will be a new Clean Energy Act that will ensure fair and predictable energy calls, and include a new simplified procurement protocol.

Other areas worthy of mention

TILMA II - the speech stated the BC will build on the strength of the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement to foster further free trade, investment and labour mobility between BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan. The speech further stated that BC will pursue unified and mutually beneficial purchasing, procurement and licensing opportunities between the three jurisdictions.

Labour - as we move into the next round of public sector bargaining, many public sector unions will have noticed the reference in the speech to the governments intent to introduce new Public-Private-Partnerships in transportation, health delivery, education support services, systems management and more. This suggests a further contracting out of services.

Site C – The government promised a report on Site C review due out this spring.

The Throne Speech represents a statement of intent from the government; it does not represent solid policy commitments. As such the BC Chamber will be watching the coming session and engaging with government Ministries on the measures outline above to ensure that the commitments made in the speech result in concrete achievements over the coming session and the coming year.

If you have any questions on the Throne Speech, material or comments provided above, please contact:

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