



MAKING REAL CHANGE HAPPEN

Speech from the Throne to Open the First Session of the
Forty-second Parliament of Canada

December 4, 2015

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Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As the representative of Her Majesty The Queen, I am pleased to be here to deliver the Speech from the Throne.

A warm welcome to those of you who are returning to your duties as parliamentarians, including those who are returning after an absence. Know that your experience is valued.

Welcome also to the 197 members who are newly elected. Your enthusiasm and fresh ideas will serve your country well.

I call on all parliamentarians to work together, with a renewed spirit of innovation, openness and collaboration.

As governor general, I have seen first-hand what a great country Canada is—from coast to coast to coast.

And I also know this: We can be even better.

How?

By being smart, and caring—on a scale as never before.

The times we live in demand nothing less.

Canada succeeds in large part because here, diverse perspectives and different opinions are celebrated, not silenced.

Parliament shall be no exception.

In this Parliament, all members will be honoured, respected and heard, wherever they sit. For here, in these chambers, the voices of all Canadians matter.

Let us not forget, however, that Canadians have been clear and unambiguous in their desire for real change. Canadians want their government to do different things, and to do things differently.

They want to be able to trust their government.

And they want leadership that is focused on the things that matter most to them.

Things like growing the economy; creating jobs; strengthening the middle class, and helping those working hard to join it.

Through careful consideration and respectful conduct, the Government can meet these challenges, and all others brought before it.

By working together in the service of all Canadians, the Government can make real change happen.

It will do so in the following ways.

GROWTH FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

First and foremost, the Government believes that all Canadians should have a real and fair chance to succeed. Central to that success is a strong and growing middle class.

The Government will, as an immediate priority, deliver a tax cut for the middle class.

This is the fair thing to do, and the smart thing to do for Canada's economy.

The Government has also committed to provide more direct help to those who need it by giving less to those who do not. The new Canada Child Benefit will do just that.

And recognizing that public investment is needed to create and support economic growth, job creation and economic prosperity, the Government will make significant new investments in public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure.

To give Canadians a more secure retirement, the Government will work with the provinces and territories to enhance the Canada Pension Plan.

The Employment Insurance system will be strengthened to make sure that it best serves both the Canadian economy and all Canadians who need it.

To create more opportunities for young Canadians, especially those from low- and middle-income families, the Government will work with the provinces and territories to make post-secondary education more affordable.

And to support the health and well-being of all Canadians, the Government will begin work with the provinces and territories to develop a new Health Accord.

The Government will undertake these and other initiatives while pursuing a fiscal plan that is responsible, transparent and suited to challenging economic times.

OPEN AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT

Second, the Government is committed to open and transparent government.

The trust Canadians have in public institutions—including Parliament—has, at times, been compromised. By working with greater openness and transparency, Parliament can restore it.

To make sure that every vote counts, the Government will undertake consultations on electoral reform, and will take action to ensure that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.

To restore public trust and bring an end to partisanship, the Government will follow through on its commitment to reform the Senate by creating a new, non-partisan, merit-based process to advise the Prime Minister on Senate appointments.

And to give Canadians a stronger voice in the House of Commons, the Government will promote more open debate and free votes, and reform and strengthen committees.

Also notable are the things the Government will not do: it will not use government ads for partisan purposes; it will not interfere with the work of parliamentary officers; and it will not resort to devices like prorogation and omnibus bills to avoid scrutiny.

A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT AND A STRONG ECONOMY

Third, the Government will prove to Canadians and to the world that a clean environment and a strong economy go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other.

Protecting the environment and growing the economy are not incompatible goals; in fact, our future success demands that we do both.

Last week, first ministers met ahead of the international climate change talks—a first step in an important and ongoing process.

Working together, the Government will continue to provide leadership as Canada works toward putting a price on carbon and reducing carbon pollution.

To encourage economic growth, the Government will make strategic investments in clean technology, provide more support for companies seeking to export those technologies, and lead by example in their use.

And as part of efforts to restore public trust, the Government will introduce new environmental assessment processes.

Public input will be sought and considered. Environmental impacts will be understood and minimized. Decisions will be informed by scientific evidence. And Indigenous peoples will be more fully engaged in reviewing and monitoring major resource development projects.

DIVERSITY IS CANADA'S STRENGTH

Fourth, the Government's agenda reflects that Canada's strength is its diversity.

Canadians elected a government to bring us together, not to set us against one another. Canada is strong because of our differences, not in spite of them.

As a country, we are strengthened in many ways: by our shared experiences, by the diversity that inspires both Canada and the world, and by the way that we treat each other.

Because it is both the right thing to do and a certain path to economic growth, the Government will undertake to renew, nation-to-nation, the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples, one based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

Among other measures, the Government will work co-operatively to implement recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, will launch an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and will work with First Nations so that every First Nations child receives a quality education.

The Government will make it easier for immigrants to build successful lives in Canada, reunite their families, and contribute to the economic success of all Canadians.

In response to a pressing international need, and underscored by Canadians' desire to help, the Government will welcome 25,000 new Canadians from Syria, to arrive in Canada by the end of February 2016.

In gratitude for the service of Canada's veterans, the Government will do more to support them and their families.

The Government will support CBC/Radio-Canada, encourage and promote the use of Canada's official languages, and invest in Canada's cultural and creative industries.

SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Fifth, the Government is committed to providing greater security and opportunity for Canadians.

Canadians are open, accepting, and generous people. We know that helping those in need strengthens our communities and makes them safer, more prosperous places to live.

The Government will strengthen its relationship with allies, especially with our closest friend and partner, the United States.

Internationally, the Government will focus its development assistance on helping the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

To contribute to greater peace throughout the world, the Government will renew Canada's commitment to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and will continue to work with its allies in the fight against terrorism.

To keep Canadians safe and be ready to respond when needed, the Government will launch an open and transparent process to review existing defence capabilities, and will invest in building a leaner, more agile, better-equipped military.

And to expand economic opportunities for all Canadians, the Government will negotiate beneficial trade agreements, and pursue other opportunities with emerging markets.

Recognizing that Canada is, fundamentally, a safe and peaceful country, the Government will continue to work to keep all Canadians safe, while at the same time protecting our cherished rights and freedoms.

To that end, the Government will introduce legislation that will provide greater support for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault; that will get handguns and assault weapons off our streets; and that will legalize, regulate and restrict access to marijuana.

CONCLUSION

The agenda outlined today is an ambitious one, but it is not one forged in isolation.

Rather, it is the result of conversations with Canadians, who told the Government—plainly and honestly—what they need to be successful.

Canadians are confident people. We know who we are, and we know what kind of country we want to live in.

We know the greatness that Canada is capable of, and we know that our success is not only about doing well for ourselves, but also about leaving an even better, more peaceful and prosperous world for our children.

As you consider the important work that lies ahead, remember that Canadians have placed their trust in you. It is now your sacred responsibility to help build that better world.

By focusing on growing our middle class, on delivering open and transparent government, on ensuring a clean environment and a strong economy, on building a stronger Canada, and on providing greater security and opportunity, the Government will make real change happen.

It will prove that better is not only possible—it is the inevitable result when Canadians work together.

Members of the House of Commons, you will be asked to appropriate the funds required to carry out the services and expenditures authorized by Parliament.

Honourable Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Commons, may Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations and make you faithful custodians of the trust bestowed upon you.