



Here for all Canadians Stability. Prosperity. Security.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

to Open the First Session of the Forty-First Parliament of Canada

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

I begin by congratulating all parliamentarians on this opening day of the Forty-first Parliament of Canada on my own behalf and on behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, who sends her congratulations and warm good wishes. Many of you are returning to your duties as Members of the House of Commons, and over one hundred of you are about to take your places as elected representatives for the first time.

Together, you have been entrusted with a profound responsibility: to serve the public interest on behalf of all Canadians.

In the months since my installation as Governor General, I have had the privilege of meeting with Canadians in their communities, and at Rideau Hall and La Citadelle. It has been an honour to

answer this unique call to service, and I want to share with you something of what I have learned in my travels across this remarkable country of ours.

I have learned that, regardless of age or affiliation, all Canadians want to help create a better future for this country. Each of us aspires to a Canada where everyone can succeed and contribute, where excellence and opportunity coexist.

I have met with Canadians from all walks of life and discovered this common ground.

In 2017, we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, and I invite all Canadians to imagine ways to build a smarter, more caring nation as we approach this wonderful milestone. I believe that in order to achieve our vision, we must work together to support families and children, to reinforce learning and innovation, and to encourage philanthropy and volunteerism.

Each of us can answer the call to service in our own way and, together, continue this bold experiment that we call Canada.

Canadians have expressed their desire for a strong, stable national government in this new Parliament. With this clear mandate, our Government will deliver on its commitments. It will implement the next phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan to build on the progress already made. It will continue to focus on jobs and growth. It will bring the federal budget back into balance. It will invest in our system of universal health care. It will support the communities and families that work so hard to care for each other. Our Government will defend the rights of law-abiding citizens, and it will promote Canadian values and interests at home and abroad.

Our Government will be here for all Canadians—for individuals, for families and for all regions of the country—as together we move Canada forward.



Here for jobs and growth

Jobs and growth will remain our Government's top priority.

Through Canada's Economic Action Plan, our Government took direct action to create jobs and protect Canadians during the global recession. On Monday, as our first order of business, our Government will reintroduce our Budget, in order to implement the next phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan—our low-tax plan for jobs and growth. We will get back to work on the things that matter most to Canadians: good jobs, security for our families and a prosperous future.

Our Government's plan builds on five years of hard work to create the right conditions for growth and job creation: a stable, predictable, low-tax environment; a highly skilled and flexible workforce; support for innovation and new technologies; and wider access to markets abroad. This approach has allowed Canada to meet the challenges of the global recession. The next phase of our Government's plan is designed to help us stay on track during the recovery.

Since 2006, Canadians have benefited from significant, broad-based tax cuts. These cuts have given families the flexibility to make the choices that are right for them. They have freed businesses to grow and succeed, creating the jobs on which Canadians depend. Our Government will continue on this path by introducing new tax credits for individuals and families, and by keeping taxes low to create jobs. It will also complete work already underway with the Government of Quebec to reach an agreement on tax harmonization no later than September 15, 2011.

However, there is more to be done. The global economy remains fragile, and risks to our recovery persist. As well, Canada's workforce is aging, and it will no longer grow as it has in the past. This demographic challenge will impact our economic future and put long-term pressures on our pension and health systems that must be addressed.

In the years ahead, our prosperity will also depend on making sure that all Canadians have the skills and opportunities to contribute, to innovate and to succeed. Our Government's plan will provide assistance for workers who want to learn new skills and seize opportunities. It will remove barriers for older workers who want to continue their careers. It will lay the foundation for long-term growth by helping a new generation gain the critical skills they will need to thrive in the workforce.

The success of Canada's job-creating businesses demands both hard work and good ideas, and we must create the right conditions for both to be rewarded. Our Government will introduce and seek swift passage of copyright legislation that balances the needs of creators and users.

In order to improve Canada's productivity, enhance our economic competitiveness and increase our standard of living, our Government will continue to make targeted investments to promote and encourage research and development in Canada's private sector and in our universities, colleges and polytechnics. It will look for ways to support innovation while ensuring that federal investment in research and development is effective and maximizes results for Canadians. It will also release and implement a Digital Economy Strategy that enhances digital infrastructure and encourages Canadian businesses to adopt digital technologies and provide digital-skills training for their employees and new hires.

In addition, our Government will continue to cut red tape for small businesses so that they can focus their attention on growing their businesses and creating jobs. This will be achieved while maintaining the highest standards to protect our environment and the health and safety of Canadians.



Our Government will also continue opening new markets for Canadian businesses in order to create good new jobs for Canadian workers. Since 2006, we have signed free trade agreements covering eight countries, and negotiations covering some fifty more are underway.

Our Government will aim to complete negotiations on a free trade agreement with the European Union by 2012. It will also seek to complete negotiations on a free trade agreement with India in 2013. In all international forums and bilateral negotiations, our Government will continue to stand up for Canadian farmers and industries by defending supply management.

The United States is our most important trading partner, ally and friend. Our Government will work with President Obama and his administration to deliver on the Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness. We will strengthen our collaboration to streamline and secure our border and enhance regulatory cooperation, ensuring that people and goods can flow freely and safely between our two countries.

Our Government also understands the importance of attracting foreign investment to our economy. Foreign investment helps Canadian companies grow by introducing new technologies and practices—launching pads to strengthen growth and innovation here at home. It provides new opportunities to connect our firms to the world. Our Government will continue to welcome foreign investment that benefits Canada.

Our Government will also move forward with willing partners to establish a new national securities regulator, subject to the Supreme Court's decision on the extent of federal jurisdiction.

Here to eliminate the deficit

Nearly three years ago, the world faced an unprecedented financial crisis. Drawing on strong fundamentals and the values of the hard-working Canadians and firms that refused to let difficult times define them, our Economic Action Plan helped Canada emerge quickly from recession. Working closely with provinces, territories and communities, our Government moved swiftly to deliver a targeted, time-limited stimulus program that created and protected jobs right across the country.

Hard work, determination and responsible choices allowed us to make these extraordinary investments when times were tough, while avoiding the high debt levels that threaten other countries. We must now take that same approach to future growth. We must eliminate the deficit and return to balanced budgets to ensure that our economy can continue to grow and create jobs and that the federal government will have sufficient fiscal flexibility for future choices.

Our Government had committed to achieving this by 2015. In order to accelerate the return to a balanced budget and to eliminate the deficit one year earlier, over the next year we will undertake a Strategic and Operating Review of government spending led by a new Cabinet subcommittee established for this purpose. This review will be focused on reducing the cost of government, while keeping taxes low and preserving transfers to individuals and provinces for essential things like pensions, health and education. Our Government will also complete its stimulus package as promised and continue specific measures to restrain the growth of government expenditures.

Our Government's plan will put us on a strong footing to resume paying down the federal debt, further reduce taxes on families and continue investing in priorities.



Here for hard-working families

There is no greater priority for Canadians than caring for their loved ones. Canadians believe that their parents and grandparents have worked hard and deserve a secure retirement. They want their children and grandchildren to grow up with every opportunity to lead happy, healthy lives.

Many Canadian families struggle to realize these goals. That is why our Government's low-tax plan will permanently enhance the Guaranteed Income Supplement for some 680,000 of Canada's most vulnerable seniors. This increase—the largest in a quarter century—will help these seniors make ends meet. At the same time, our Government will continue to help Canadians save for their retirement, and will work with provincial and territorial partners to implement the Pooled Registered Pension Plan.

Our Government's plan also recognizes the tremendous time and resources required of family caregivers. Many individuals and families have added responsibilities in caring for infirm parents or relatives. These family caregivers make special sacrifices, often leaving the workforce temporarily and forgoing employment income.

The new Family Caregiver Tax Credit will support those who care for a dependent family member who is infirm. In addition, our Government will remove the cap on eligible expenses that caregivers can claim under the Medical Expense Tax Credit.

Our Government will also support parents in providing their children with opportunities to grow personally and discover their creative passions by establishing a Children's Arts Tax Credit.

Canadians want and expect their health care system to be there when they and their families need it most. Canadians want better results from the health care system, at the same time as an aging population is putting unprecedented pressure on the system's ability to deliver.

Our Government is committed to respecting provincial jurisdiction and working with the provinces and territories to ensure that the health care system is sustainable and that there is accountability for results. It will maintain the six percent escalator for the Canada Health Transfer, while working collaboratively with provincial partners to renew the Health Accord and to continue reducing wait times. As has been done before, our Government will enter into a separate agreement with the Government of Quebec regarding the implementation of the renewed Health Accord.



Here to stand on guard for Canada

Canadians are united by core values, a shared history and a sense of common purpose. Our Government will join Canadians in celebrating our heritage, in promoting our values and in standing for what is right on the world stage. In an uncertain global environment, our Government will also continue to pursue a stable, principled foreign policy that advances Canada's interests.

The Canadian Armed Forces play a crucial role in defending our sovereignty and national security. As the Canadian mission in Afghanistan transitions to training, diplomacy and development, our Government joins Canadians in honouring those who gave their lives and in recognizing the sacrifice and achievements of all the men and women, both military and civilian, who have served and continue to serve in Afghanistan. Our Government will continue to recognize and support all veterans.

Today, as North Africa and the Middle East are being transformed by their people, the Canadian Armed Forces are standing tall with our allies to protect civilians in Libya. Our Government will hold a parliamentary debate on the future of this important mission.

As part of our ongoing efforts to promote human rights, our Government will create a new Office of Religious Freedom to help protect religious minorities and to promote the pluralism that is essential to the development of free and democratic societies.

We will also take action to strengthen our national sovereignty. Our Government is committed to protecting the integrity of our immigration system. It will introduce measures to address marriage fraud—an abuse of our system that can victimize unsuspecting Canadians and vulnerable immigrants. Our Government will also reintroduce legislation to combat human smuggling, which can place migrants in dangerous conditions and undermine trust in Canada’s immigration system.

Our Government has made Canada’s North a cornerstone of its agenda. The strongest expression of our sovereignty comes through presence and actions, not words. Our Government will continue to exercise leadership in the stewardship of northern lands and waters. It is also committed to working with the Northwest Territories and the private sector to complete the Dempster Highway—by linking Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk—thereby realizing Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s vision of connecting Canada by road from sea to sea to sea.

Canada’s natural environment shapes our national identity, our health and our prosperity. Our Government has expanded protected lands and marine areas to an unprecedented extent, so that current and future generations can continue to enjoy them. In this, the 100th anniversary year of our national parks system, our Government will create significant new protected areas. It will work with provincial, regional, municipal, Aboriginal and community stakeholders toward establishing an urban national park in the Rouge Valley of eastern Toronto. Looking to the future, our Government will engage a broad range of stakeholders on the development of a National Conservation Plan, to move our conservation objectives forward and better connect all Canadians with nature.

Our Government is committed to developing Canada's extraordinary resource wealth in a way that protects the environment. It will support major new clean energy projects of national or regional significance, such as the planned Lower Churchill hydroelectricity project in Atlantic Canada. It will engage the provinces, territories and industry on ways to improve the regulatory and environmental assessment process for resource projects, while ensuring meaningful consultation with affected communities, including Aboriginal communities.

Beyond our natural heritage, Canadians also cherish our shared history. Anniversaries are an important part of how a society marks its collective progress and defines its goals for the future. A key milestone next year will be the bicentennial of the War of 1812. We will remember how those of diverse backgrounds and various regions came together to fight for Canada, ensuring the independent destiny of our country in North America. We will also celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Selkirk Settlement, which marks the founding of Manitoba and the early days of the modern West.

Next year we will observe Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, celebrating her six decades of service as Queen of Canada. And Canadians look forward, in just a few weeks' time, to welcoming Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on their first Royal Tour since their marriage this spring.

Here for law-abiding Canadians

The Government of Canada has no more fundamental duty than to protect the personal safety of our citizens and defend against threats to our national security.

Our Government will move quickly to reintroduce comprehensive law-and-order legislation to combat crime and terrorism. These measures will protect children from sex offenders. They will eliminate house arrest and pardons for serious crimes. They will give law enforcement officials, courts and victims the legal tools they need to fight criminals and terrorists. Our Government will continue to protect the most vulnerable in society and work to prevent crime. It will propose tougher sentences for those who abuse seniors and will help at-risk youth avoid gangs and criminal activity. It will address the problem of violence against women and girls.

Our Government has always believed the interests of law-abiding citizens should be placed ahead of those of criminals. Canadians who are victimized or threatened by crime deserve their government's support and protection, and they should have the right to take reasonable steps to defend themselves and their property when the police cannot be there to assist them. Our Government will reintroduce legislation to clarify and strengthen laws on self-defence, defence of property and citizen's arrest.

Our Government will also continue to implement its response to the Air India Report.

Here for communities and industries

In addition to guarding the interests of our nation as a whole, our Government will continue taking action to address the needs and aspirations of every region of the country. Local communities are best placed to overcome their unique challenges, but government can help create the conditions for these communities—and the industries that sustain them—to succeed.

Canada's rural communities are rich in history and culture, and generations of rural Canadians have worked hard and played by the rules. They should not be the target of unfair laws. Our Government will act on its promise to introduce legislation to end the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry.

Canada's traditional industries remain crucial to our economy. Our Government has always stood behind Canada's agricultural, forestry, fishing, mineral, manufacturing and energy sectors—and will continue to support them as they innovate and grow. It will also introduce legislation to ensure that western farmers have the freedom to sell wheat and barley on the open market.

Canada's Aboriginal peoples are central to Canada's history, and our Government has made it a priority to renew and deepen our relationship. The contribution of Canada's Aboriginal peoples will be important to our future prosperity. Concerted action is needed to address the barriers to social and economic participation that many Aboriginal Canadians face.

Our Government will work with Aboriginal communities, provinces and territories to meet this challenge. It will help open the door to greater economic development by providing new investments in First Nations Land Management. It will promote access to clean water and the deployment of clean energy technology in Aboriginal and northern communities.

Building on the work of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education, our Government will engage with partners to make concrete, positive changes to give First Nations children a better education so that they can realize their dreams. We will also expand adult basic education programming in the territories to help to increase education and employment levels.

Our Government will also introduce legislation to ensure that people living on reserve have the same matrimonial real property rights and protections as other Canadians.

Canada's diverse communities are connected by shared values and aspirations, and by the willingness to lend a hand. This has been markedly evident in the response of ordinary Canadians to recent and devastating floods and wildfires. Our Government recognizes the resolve and courage shown by Canadian communities in the face of adversity and will stand by them in their times of need.

Here for integrity and accountability

In these and all other measures our Government will pursue, we will provide the principled, accountable leadership and good, clean government that Canadians deserve. On first taking office, our Government introduced major new accountability legislation as its first act in the Thirty-ninth Parliament, and it will now move forward on its long-standing commitment to democratic reform.

Reform of the Senate remains a priority for our Government. Our Government will reintroduce legislation to limit term lengths and to encourage provinces and territories to hold elections for Senate nominees.

Canadians rightly expect fairness and accountability in the full range of government institutions that serve them. Our Government will reintroduce legislation to restore fair representation in the House of Commons. It will take steps to phase out direct taxpayer subsidies to federal political parties over the next three years. It will support transparency for First Nations communities by requiring their chiefs and councillors to publish their salaries and expenses. Our Government will also support the efforts of the Public Service to modernize the way it works so that it can continue to provide the highest standard of service to Canadians.

In filling the two upcoming vacancies on the Supreme Court of Canada, our Government will engage parliamentarians through the transparent process first used in 2006.

Our Government will also ensure that citizens, the private sector and other partners have improved access to the workings of government through open data, open information and open dialogue.

Conclusion

As Canadians, we take pride in our history and look forward to our future as the true North, strong and free. From our earliest days, we have always come together to advance our common purpose, each of us ready to do our part to move Canada forward.

Building on the careful investments and decisive actions of the past five years, our Government will move swiftly to deliver the next important phase of the Economic Action Plan. Our Government will reflect the courage Canadians show in meeting the challenges of today and their determination to rise to those they see on the horizon.

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 Senators and Members of the House of Commons, let the work of our great democracy support Canadians as they go about fashioning a twenty-first century destiny limited only by their ambition and imagination.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations and make you equal to the trust bestowed upon you.