

BUDGET 2020 SPEECH

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that we are on the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and I want to give a warm welcome to everyone here today.

A budget is built with the work and input of many — thanks to all the staff in the Ministry of Finance and my office for their extraordinary efforts.

Thank you to everyone who wrote and took part in the Select Standing Committee on Finance's budget consultations and thank you to the many people who have shared their ideas and hopes for the future of our province.

Working together will help us build a stronger B.C. for everyone.

That's what *Budget 2020* is all about.

It's about the fundamental changes our government has been making for the people of British Columbia.

It's about continuing to fix the problems facing families today.

And it's about delivering the results that keep us moving forward together.

The changes we have made are all about making lives better today and creating opportunities that last a lifetime — opportunities to put down roots, contribute to your community, and have a job that provides a good quality of life.

These are the things that drive us — and my family is no exception.

In the 1950s, my grandparents left England and moved to Saskatchewan with my mum. Like so many others who immigrated to Canada, they left the only home they had ever known in search of a better life for their family.

Times were tough, money was tight. My grandmother soon found a job at the local hospital. Together, she and my grandfather worked day in and day out to put food on the table and keep a roof over our heads.

For my grandparents, family was never just immediate family — it was anyone in our community who needed a hand up. Over the years, our family grew to include dozens of foster kids.

Growing up alongside children of all ages and abilities showed me that while everyone has something to contribute to this world, not everyone is given the opportunity they need to make their mark.

While my grandmother possessed a quiet, solid strength, my mother is the trail-blazer and fierce community advocate.

As a young single parent with two children, my mum enrolled in teacher's college, about two hours away from our family home in Saskatchewan. During the week, my grandparents would take care of me and my sister, while my mum put herself through school.

Looking back, I can see the barriers she faced as a single parent to two young girls living in a small prairie town. I also recognize that access to education creates opportunities that span generations — it has the power to change a family forever.

Had the door to opportunity remained closed for my mother, I have no doubt that my life would have looked very different.

These personal experiences also reflect what I have heard from so many British Columbians. People want to do for themselves; sometimes they just need a door to open for that to happen.

As Finance Minister, it's my job to make sure that the benefits of B.C.'s strong economy are felt by everyone, not just the few at the top.

After nearly three years of choices that put people first, we're starting to see the results. From new roads, hospitals, schools, and housing, to new services and job opportunities... life in B.C. is getting better every day.

And our economy is stronger because we are putting B.C. on a path to a cleaner, better future.

This is my third full budget as Finance Minister.

As with previous years, our government continues to work from a balanced budget. Our fiscal strategy lays out a solid plan with layers of planning and foresight.

B.C. remains an economic leader in Canada. We are the only province with triple-A credit ratings from the three major international rating agencies.

We have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, and zero operating debt.

Our fiscal foundation remains strong, as does our commitment to:

- making life more affordable;
- delivering the services British Columbians depend on; and
- building a sustainable economy with opportunities for everyone.

We know that delivering on these priorities means strong climate action, meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.

Supported by the Confidence and Supply Agreement with the BC Green Party caucus, government is advancing these priorities.

Moving forward, together

Together, we have made a lot of progress and, today, I am presenting our plan to keep B.C. moving forward.

Budget 2020 breaks down barriers to opportunity for you, your children and your neighbours.

Budget 2020 delivers access to a good education, quality health care and vital community supports.

And *Budget 2020* supports British Columbians who are working hard to get ahead by making life more affordable.

We are not here to deliver the largest surplus possible, at all costs.

The point of a budget is to plan ahead, to set priorities and to make responsible decisions that are good for people over the long term.

That is what we have done for the last two and a half years, and we can't afford to turn back.

Choosing a different path

Over the last decade our province's economy has remained strong, but many people and communities fell further behind.

There was a bright future in British Columbia, but only for the few who could afford it.

I am proud to say that, as a province, we are now on a different path. We are making different choices. And *Budget 2020* backs up our choices with action.

Mr. Speaker, the days of cashing in on a hot real estate market at the expense of hardworking British Columbians are done.

Instead of turning a blind eye to money laundering and the housing crisis, we're acting so that everyone can afford a future in British Columbia.

Money laundering in our economy must end. Our goal is to ensure balance — and it is not balanced to have an economy distorted by dirty money.

Budget 2020 delivers on our commitment to conduct a public inquiry and get people the answers they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, the old practice of hoarding surplus at the expense of people is over. Instead, we are choosing a balanced fiscal approach, one that maintains a reasonable surplus while investing in people.

Because we understand that when the door to opportunity closes one too many times, people can lose hope. A little support can be life changing.

Building on our government's poverty reduction plan, *Budget 2020* increases earnings exemptions for people receiving income and disability assistance.

This gives people a chance to increase their household income, remain connected to the workforce, and build up the kind of valuable work experience that can lead to a good-paying job.

And after years of cuts that hurt people most in need, *Budget 2020* provides new funding for children in care and adults with diverse abilities.

A commitment to ongoing funding for the cultural connections program will provide more support for Indigenous children to stay connected with their communities and families.

Mr. Speaker, in partnership with Indigenous peoples, we are choosing a more stable and prosperous path for everyone.

We got right to work with new money for language revitalization, a historic revenue-sharing agreement, and changes to the child welfare system that will keep more Indigenous children in their communities.

Aboriginal friendship centres now have long-term, stable funding. And we stepped up as the first province to fund on-reserve housing in Canada.

I am proud to say that the human rights of Indigenous peoples are now enshrined in law as the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.

I recognize the road ahead is not without its challenges. But if we invite the conversation and work from a place of respect, we will build a better future together.

And to achieve that future, Mr. Speaker, our government is not waiting to take action on complex problems that defy simple solutions.

Our government has taken significant steps to help address sustainability at ICBC and affordability for British Columbians.

While the old government ignored the problems with auto insurance, we are transforming ICBC to make it work for you.

Instead of pushing problems down the road, we are standing up for the best interests of British Columbians.

I want to recognize that, right now, the people who depend on B.C.'s forest industry are hurting. A thriving forest sector has provided good, stable jobs for many families going back generations.

However, over the last number of years, the mountain pine beetle infestation, wildfires and the softwood lumber dispute have reduced timber supply and triggered a wave of mills to close their doors or scale back shifts.

These changes didn't happen overnight, but that doesn't lessen the hardship that forest workers and their families are facing right now.

We won't turn our backs on the people who have helped power our province for so long.

Our government's top priority is to provide the help that people need to get on with their lives, to support their families, and to plan for a good future in our province.

Workers are now getting job placement and skills training, equipment loans for coastal logging contractors, grants for hard-hit communities, and programs to support early retirement.

Investments in public infrastructure are building a better British Columbia, and wherever possible, B.C. engineered wood will serve as the foundation.

These are important steps. But a healthy and sustainable forest industry depends on bringing together industry, First Nations, unions and government to find solutions.

Budget 2020 takes another step forward with new funding to begin developing opportunities for B.C.'s bio-economy and revitalization within the forest sector.

We will keep working hard to make sure that forest workers, contractors, and communities get the support they deserve.

A better future, together

Because we are all in this together. And only when we work together, will we succeed in the kind of fundamental change that provides relief from the problems facing people now and inspires hope for a better future.

A future where your opportunities are not defined by your age, income bracket or home address. Instead, our plan creates a lifetime of opportunity for everyone in British Columbia.

For my family — as it does for so many others — it all started with a good education.

Going back to school and building up her career meant that my mother was able to put away a little money each month and build a better future for herself and our family.

Growing up, we didn't always have a lot, but we had enough for both me and my sister to know that nothing was out of reach.

As Finance Minister, I am unwavering in my commitment to delivering the opportunities that our children and grandchildren deserve.

But for too long, families were left to struggle as their monthly bills kept going up, while the health, education, and community supports they counted on were slashed.

In a prosperous province like British Columbia, we can and must do better.

And we are.

Launching this fall, the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit will help lift up thousands of kids and give them the opportunities they deserve, now and down the road.

Families with one child will be eligible to receive up to \$1,600 annually. For two children, that goes up to \$2,600, and it's up to \$3,400 for three kids. People can bank on this tax-free support up until their child's eighteenth birthday.

On top of the new benefit, this will be the first full year that people won't have to pay the unfair MSP premium.

Together, these two measures could save families thousands of dollars that they can put towards what really matters: setting up the next generation for success.

For many, that starts with access to affordable, high-quality child care.

Child care for all is closer than ever to becoming a reality in our province. Thousands of new licensed child care spaces are opening, and some parents are saving nearly \$20,000 annually.

Budget 2020 builds on the progress with total investments reaching \$2 billion over three years for child care in British Columbia.

Child care is critical to achieving equality in the workplace, helping to close the gender pay gap, and giving more parents — particularly women — the opportunity to take their careers to the next level.

We are also investing in B.C.'s early childhood educators — again, almost entirely women — with more bursaries and increased wages.

Additionally, B.C.'s minimum wage will rise to more than \$15 per hour by 2021. For the almost 140,000 people who currently earn minimum wage, more than half of which are women, this will provide a much-needed boost.

We've also invested over \$12 million to provide more opportunities for women to become today's electricians, carpenters and heavy-duty mechanics, while opening the door for the next generation of girls.

Mr. Speaker, our government is putting children and families first. Child care for all is a fundamental change that will redefine an entirely new generation of children and their parents.

Not only does quality child care give parents peace of mind, it can help provide kids with the solid start they need for a smooth transition to school.

Record investments in education mean that B.C. kids are learning in some of the smallest class sizes in a decade with more supports available for children of all ages and abilities.

New schools are opening in some of our fastest growing communities, from Surrey to Fort St. John, and Chilliwack to Langley, to inspire hope, curiosity and confidence in young learners.

As Finance Minister, but also as a mother and grandmother, I know the success of our province depends on giving our kids the best possible start in life.

Inside the classroom, we are supporting students with more than 4,200 teachers, including 700 new special education teachers, and nearly 200 new teacher-psychologists and counsellors.

I am proud to say that *Budget 2020* includes new funding of \$339 million over the next three years to continue improving B.C. schools and setting students up for success.

Together, these investments add to the work already underway to strengthen our K-12 system, build better and safer schools, and prepare students for life after graduation.

Mr. Speaker, we are making sure that our young people have the skills and training to excel in the economy of tomorrow.

In the next 10 years, there will be more than 800,000 job openings in health care, early childhood education, skilled trades, tech and much more.

There are good things happening in our province, and we want everyone to be a part of it.

That is why our government has focused on breaking down barriers and creating pathways to opportunities.

Adult Basic Education and English Language Learning are now free.

Twelve hundred former youth in care are now attending college, university and trade schools for free.

B.C. student loans are now interest free.

And we're partnering with post-secondary institutions to build thousands more student housing beds.

Because we want our young people to focus on gaining the skills, knowledge and experience they need to provide for themselves and help power B.C.'s economy.

From my own experience, I saw how being able to go to school and build up my mum's career changed her and my family. As a single parent, it put her on the pathway to economic independence and opened doors for me and my sister.

At the same time, being able to rely on the support of family helped my mum overcome the obstacles that may otherwise have kept her out of school. She was able to seize the opportunity and build a better life for herself and our family.

These are the kinds of opportunities that every person — and every family — deserve. And as Finance Minister, this is exactly what I intend to deliver.

As part of Budget 2020, I am proud to announce the new BC Access Grant for post-secondary students.

Starting in September 2020, the new BC Access Grant will provide upfront funding to more than 40,000 students who may otherwise struggle to pay for post-secondary education.

Between the new access grant and the Canada Student Grant, students can receive up to \$4,000 a year to help them with the cost of tuition.

And — for the first time — provincial grants will be available to part-time students and students enrolled in programs of less than two years.

This will help people land good-paying jobs in high-demand fields like early childhood education, health care and the skilled trades.

This grant is about investing in our shared future... A future where B.C.'s workforce is flexible, innovative and ready to thrive in a world shaped by advancing technology, global trade and climate action.

And, I believe B.C. will rise to that challenge thanks to the passion and talents of the people who call our province home.

Building up a skilled workforce is one part of the equation. But we also need to build affordable housing to keep people in the neighbourhoods where they live, work and learn.

Sweeping change is on the way thanks to the largest investment in affordable housing in B.C.'s history — \$7 billion over 10 years to deliver 114,000 homes. In just two and a half years, almost 23,000 new homes are underway or complete throughout the province.

We started where the impact was most immediate. More than 2,000 people who were homeless now have stable housing and access to 24/7 support. And another 800 supportive homes are on the way.

This year's budget provides additional funding for more emergency shelter spaces, supportive homes and navigation centres to provide wraparound supports for people in need.

Overall, government is delivering more than \$4 billion over three years to help bring affordable housing within reach for people of all ages and income levels.

We have a long way to go and we will get there in partnership with all levels of government, Indigenous peoples, not for profits and the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, our government is delivering the homes British Columbians need, along with the infrastructure and services that people count on, from our kids to our parents and grandparents.

We know there is nothing more important than being able to access high-quality health care when you or your loved one needs it the most. As B.C.'s population grows and ages, we need to make sure we are ready to meet the demand.

And *Budget 2020* delivers. We are providing an additional \$1 billion over three years for British Columbia's health-care system.

This new funding will help bring down surgical wait times and address the growing demand for services.

Budget 2020 delivers better care for you and your family by building on the steps we have already taken to transform B.C.'s health care system.

New or upgraded hospitals are coming to Fort St. James, Surrey, Williams Lake, Burnaby, Quesnel, Vancouver, Trail, Richmond, Nanaimo, North Vancouver, Dawson Creek, the Cowichan Valley and Terrace.

New urgent and primary care centres are now open in Kamloops, Quesnel, Langford, Surrey, Vancouver, Nanaimo, Prince George, Burnaby, North Vancouver, Kelowna, Vernon, Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. And another two centres are opening soon in Victoria and East Vancouver.

After years of cuts, investments in long-term care and respite services are giving seniors and their caregivers a well-deserved boost.

No one should be forced to decide between buying groceries or prescription medicine. This year marks the first anniversary of eliminating or reducing Fair Pharmacare deductibles for 240,000 families.

And soon, every post-secondary student will have access to 24/7 mental-health support services. This builds on a province-wide expansion of Foundry Centres to provide youth and families with a "one stop shop" for mental-health and substance-use supports.

Because it's crucial to reach out to people early, before challenges escalate.

We know there's more to do, especially when it comes to keeping our young people healthy.

As part of *Budget 2020*, B.C. will begin charging PST on sweetened carbonated drinks to help address the health and economic costs of these beverages.

Research shows that teens between the ages of 14 and 18 are the top consumers of pop. This is a step that health professionals and an all-party committee have long supported.

Because this is about keeping young people healthy while taking in a bit of revenue to continue to pay for enhanced health care services for everyone.

An economy that works for people

We know that people work hard to build a good life for themselves and their family. And in turn, people deserve an economy that works hard for them...

By delivering good, stable jobs in all corners of the province.

By building a connected and resilient network of communities.

And by recognizing that a prosperous future means a clean future.

To do that, we need an economy that works for people. When people thrive, our economy thrives.

As Finance Minister, I often speak about the importance of building a diverse, sustainable and resilient economy. But what does that mean?

I think about my own story. My grandparents were both able to find good jobs that allowed them to provide for our family. My mum was able to go back to school and build up her career because my grandparents were willing and able to look after me and my sister.

To me, this gets at the heart of what resilience looks like, for families and communities. It doesn't come down to our own individual strength, but rather the strength of the community we build around us.

And this comes back to the core value guiding our government. It does not come down to a choice between investing in a strong economy, a clean environment, or in the people that call this province home.

Investing in people, communities, and a clean future is fundamental to building a strong and sustainable economy.

This is a significant departure from what people experienced throughout much of the past decade. While British Columbia's economy remained strong, many people and communities fell further behind.

Now, together, we are building a better future grounded by an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top.

As part of *Budget 2020* and our government's ongoing work to improve the services and infrastructure that we all depend on, a new tax bracket is being introduced for the top 1% of income earners in our province.

Nearly half the revenue will come from people making more than \$1 million annually.

This will help to deliver the infrastructure and services that create good jobs and keep B.C.'s economy moving, while maintaining B.C.'s tax system as one of the most competitive in the country.

As I've said before, we continue to do our part and look carefully at spending across government. This is simply part of ongoing responsible budget management.

No matter where you call home — whether it's our province's north, south, east or west — our plan creates opportunities for you.

I know that as proud British Columbians, there is more that unites us than divides us.

We all want life to be more affordable. We all want a quality education for our kids. We all want access to health care when we need it. And we all want to feel the benefits that come with a strong provincial economy.

These are the priorities that have shaped our province's historic capital plan. The scale of change is staggering: \$18 billion worth of work is happening in all corners of the province.

By building the schools, roads, hospitals, housing, post-secondary facilities and more that our growing province needs, our plan is supporting 100,000 direct and indirect jobs during construction.

Together, we are building our way to a better quality of life — no matter where you live.

For our urban centres, parents taking their kids to soccer practice will be able to hop on the Broadway Subway. Or, an electrician travelling from her home in Surrey to a job in New West will get where she needs to go because of the new Pattullo Bridge.

Metro Vancouver is already home to one of the top transit systems in the world. Our government is committed to building on the momentum, creating transit-oriented housing, good jobs and a path towards a cleaner future.

Looking to our rural communities, Highway 1 upgrades between Kamloops and Alberta will improve travel for locals, visitors and commercial drivers. And east of Golden, we are on the final phase of the Kicking Horse Canyon Project.

Investments in BC Transit are shortening daily commutes for people, while the BC North Bus connects our northern residents to jobs and services, along with family and friends.

After years of cuts to ferry service, our government is prioritizing coastal communities. Sailings have been added, fares have been frozen on major routes, and the seniors discount is back in effect.

But infrastructure is about more than ferries, roads, bridges and transit — it is also about the flow of ideas, knowledge and opportunity.

We are close to bringing our 500th connected community online. This means a digital world of opportunity is now open to people in Deka Lake, Clinton, Tofino, and Haida Gwaii.

British Columbia is growing, and we need to ramp up infrastructure investments — digital and otherwise — to keep goods, services, and people moving and B.C. businesses thriving.

As government, we are working closely with the Business Council of British Columbia and the BC Chamber of Commerce to foster a competitive environment. And I want to say thank you to the many businesses and entrepreneurs who have chosen to set up shop in B.C.

We know that our economy must provide opportunities for businesses to succeed — and they are.

Named as one of 2019's top global cleantech companies, Semios gives B.C. farmers real-time data on their crops.

This kind of innovation feeds into the work of our government's Food Security Task Force, which aims to unlock the potential for agri-tech in B.C, create more jobs and reduce waste.

And we are making good progress. Thanks to the hard-working people who make up B.C.'s agriculture sector, 2018 was a record year for revenue. Another boost will come from new regional food hubs in Surrey, Port Alberni, Quesnel and Vancouver.

Mining, another one of B.C.'s key industries, is joining forces with clean-tech to give local companies a global advantage.

As one example, Saltworks has created a new energy efficient technology that turns contaminated water from resource extraction into clean, fresh water.

In the rapidly expanding field of biotech, homegrown talent like STEMCELL Technologies is on track to create hundreds of new jobs in Burnaby.

And as work scales up on LNG Canada's \$40 billion project, our province will benefit from an estimated 10,000 construction jobs and 950 permanent jobs.

This new industry will create a legacy of skills and economic opportunity to sustain people and communities from the northeast to the north coast.

It's clear that good things are happening in B.C.

In 2019, more than 45,000 jobs were added in the private sector, along with continued wage growth.

In partnership with the BC Green Party caucus, the Emerging Economy Task Force will help keep B.C. at the cutting edge of clean tech, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

As I've said before, we cannot have a strong economy without creating more opportunities for B.C.'s rural regions to prosper.

Tourism has become a major province-wide employer and an economic driver for many small and rural communities. Growing the tourism industry can help boost local businesses and provide life-long careers for people right around our province.

New and upgraded infrastructure delivered through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program is also helping to build healthy and resilient communities.

We're working with the federal government, local governments and First Nations to deliver projects that support local growth, a green economy and inclusive communities. Projects are underway throughout the province — with more on the way this year.

Our government knows that for many communities paying for the infrastructure that people and businesses need can be tough, or almost impossible on their own.

That is why we are investing in rural communities in a way that works for them.

Soon, people in Williams Lake will be able to connect at a new community centre.

For Osoyoos and Prince Rupert, this new funding will resolve longstanding problems with the quality of their drinking water.

Investing in greener infrastructure is part of our government's plan to grow the economy, while protecting the clean water, land and air that we — as British Columbians — all cherish.

Harnessing the power of a greener future to help grow our economy is at the heart of CleanBC, our government's commitment to climate action.

As part of last year's budget, we backed our plan with approximately \$900 million over three years.

Budget 2020 builds on CleanBC with an additional \$419 million over the fiscal plan. This will go towards making our schools, universities, colleges and hospitals more energy efficient, along with increased support to help industries move towards clean, low-carbon solutions.

This year's budget maintains increases to the Climate Action Tax Credit for families and adds \$20 million to the Province's program to make purchasing a zero-emission vehicle more affordable.

I'm proud to say that we have almost hit our 2025 electric vehicle target — four years ahead of schedule. This new funding will help accelerate the clean energy transition.

Our economy remains resilient, but every year we must plan for and adapt to a changing climate. Recent years have seen wildfires rage across our province and natural disasters devastate people, homes, communities, business and industry.

In response, the Province is boosting total funding to \$519 million over the fiscal plan to help B.C. prepare for, respond to and recover from wildfires, floods and other emergencies.

Because we are stronger when we work together.

In partnership with Indigenous peoples, we are choosing a more stable and prosperous path forward for everyone.

Passing the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* was a historic day. It was the culmination of many years of hard work from many people — and a long wait for Indigenous peoples.

And we have a lot of hard work still to do.

The act is a significant step forward and will serve as the foundation for a new way of living and working together.

Funds are flowing to First Nations through a historic revenue-sharing agreement for an estimated \$3 billion over the next 25 years. For many communities, being able to count on stable revenue long into the future is making a real and meaningful difference.

The funds are being put to good use building a youth community centre, supporting forest management to protect peoples' homes from wildfires, and launching language programs that are key to the health of communities.

For the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation it means building up to 30 new homes — the first new housing the community has had in years.

And finding a place to call home in the community you love is transformational.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, it is a true privilege to stand here today and table our government's third full budget that offers stability and opportunity.

I am honoured to come to work every day to make life better for the people of British Columbia.

Together, we have accomplished a great deal. Families are saving thousands of dollars thanks to investments in child care, the elimination of MSP premiums, the soon to launch BC Child Opportunity Benefit and the new BC Access Grant.

Families will benefit from new funding to strengthen our schools and hospitals, while delivering essential community supports.

Meanwhile, landmark investments in roads, bridges, housing, hospitals and schools are delivering a better quality of life while creating jobs.

Together, we have chosen a fundamentally different path — a choice we can all be proud of. We are making life more affordable, providing the services people count on, and creating opportunities for you and your children to build a good life in British Columbia.

Yes, significant progress has been made. But there is no shortage of work still to do.

You, the people of British Columbia, have always been working hard to get ahead.

And we are working hard for you.

I want my grandkids to know the sense of pride that comes from putting down roots, contributing to your community and building a good life for yourself, your family, and others.

This is at the heart of what I believe all British Columbians want: a stronger province for everyone.

A province where the next generation will not face a housing crisis. People will be able to find a more affordable home with space for their family to grow.

A province where equal opportunity and access to education will put people's dreams within reach and end the cycle of poverty.

A province where the heroes of our communities — our early childhood educators, parents, health care workers, teachers, and trades people — will see the recognition they deserve for keeping our province running.

A province where everyone will have access to the health and mental health services they need — no matter where they live and no matter the size of their bank account.

And a province with a strong economy where future generations can enjoy our clean water, land and air.

Our government is working hard for you every single day.

Budget 2020 is our plan to keep B.C. moving forward.

Together, we are building a stronger B.C., for everyone.