



**SPEECH FROM THE
THRONE 2020
ENSIGHT ANALYSIS**

SEPTEMBER 23, 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Unpacking Today's Speech (*Page 2*)
2. Party Leaders Address the Nation (*Page 3*)
3. Overview of the Speech from the Throne (*Page 4*)
4. Extended Analysis (*Page 6*)
5. The Opposition Weighs In (*Page 8*)
6. What You Might Have Missed in Today's Speech (*Page 9*)
7. Conclusion (*Page 11*)

UNPACKING TODAY'S SPEECH

Today's Speech from the Throne marks the 150th Speech since Confederation. Every government since then has developed speeches highlighting their priorities for the coming Parliamentary session. Some speeches are big and grand, showcasing the sweeping ambitions of the government of the day. Others are more down-to-earth, with stay-the-course messaging and good management at their hearts. This Speech, delivered during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, was billed as being one of the most ambitious, wide-ranging, progressive, and green Throne Speeches in Canadian history.

So, how did the Speech match up with expectations? Our Overview and Extended Analysis sections have all the details and political insights you need to know as we move into the second session of the 43rd Parliament of Canada. Read on for insights into the reactions of the opposition party leaders to the Speech, as well as for interesting tidbits you may not have noticed in the Speech itself.

LEADERS ADDRESS THE NATION

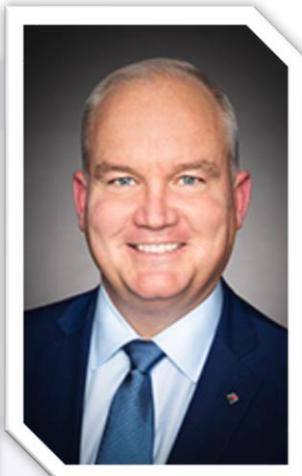
At 6:30 PM EST tonight the Prime Minister addressed the nation, a rare move in normal circumstances. Each of the three main opposition leaders were also given the opportunity to speak, all with pre-recorded campaign style videos.

The **Prime Minister** did not use his speech to announce anything new. Instead he highlighted elements of the Throne Speech and repeated warnings from health officials that Canada is in a second pandemic wave "that could be much worse than the spring." He acknowledged that Thanksgiving would likely not be the same with our families, but holds out hope that Christmas could be saved if we act now.

After the Prime Minister, Conservative leader **Erin O'Toole** took his time to make his response highly politically. With little mention of COVID, he took time to mention China and the national divide.

Bloc Québécois leader **Yves-François Blanchet** used his time to criticize Trudeau on setting national standards that impose on provinces. He is looking for unconditional health transfers in exchange for his support of the SFTT.

Finally, NDP leader **Jagmeet Singh** was the last to speak. He repeatedly mentioned that his party was here for Canadians but didn't captivate the audience.



Overview of the Speech from the Throne

At a high level, the Speech from the Throne focused on four main foundations of the government's plan to deal with the issues of the modern day, including, most importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic. Those foundations include fighting the pandemic and saving lives, supporting people and businesses through this crisis, building back better in a post-COVID-19 Canada, and standing up for who we are as Canadians.

Protecting Canadians from COVID-19

- The federal government will continue to help provinces increase their testing capacity. As soon as tests are approved in Canada, the government will do everything it can to see them deployed. This includes creating a federal Testing Assistance Response Team to quickly meet surge testing needs.
- The government will work to target additional financial support directly to businesses that had to temporarily shut down because of local public health decisions.
- Canada will continue building domestic capacity for PPE while securing supply chains.

Helping Canadians Through the Pandemic

- Given the huge impacts COVID-19 has had on job markets, the Throne speech focused on getting more Canadians to get back to work. This includes creating more than a million jobs to restore employment to previous levels, create direct investments in the social sector and infrastructure, immediate training to quickly skill-up workers, and incentives for employers to hire and retain workers.
- The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) will be extended through to next summer, so workers can remain on the payroll.
- The government will create a transitional Canada Recovery Benefit for those who would not otherwise qualify for employment insurance.

- An Action Plan for Women in the Economy will help more women get back into the workforce and ensure a feminist and intersectional response to the pandemic and recovery. This includes giving parents access to affordable, inclusive, and high-quality childcare, and the creation of a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system.
- For small businesses, the Canada Emergency Business Account will be expanded, and the Business Credit Availability Program will be improved.
- The government will introduce further support for industries that have been the hardest hit, including travel and tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries like the performing arts.

Building Back Better

- To support and protect seniors, the government will work with provinces and territories to set new national standards for long-term care to ensure seniors get the best support possible.
- A new Disability Inclusion Plan will present a new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors and a better process to determine eligibility for government disability programs and benefits.
- Government committed to accelerating steps to achieve national universal pharmacare, developing a rare-disease strategy to help Canadian families save money on high-cost drugs, establishing a national formulary to keep drug prices low, and working with provinces and territories willing to move forward without delay.
- To keep Canadians safe the government will continue to implement firearms policy commitments and accelerate investments in shelters and transitional housing.
- Unsurprisingly, the government noted they will invest in all types of infrastructure, including public transit, energy-efficient retrofits, clean energy, rural broadband, and affordable housing, particularly for Indigenous Peoples and northern communities.

- True to Liberal form, climate action was the cornerstone of the government's new plan to support and create a million jobs across the country.

A Canada To Fight For

- The government will continue to support Indigenous communities and contain the spread of COVID-19 in these communities. They reaffirmed their commitment to reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous peoples.
- The Throne Speech also addressed systemic racism and protection the two official languages.
- Canada will continue to bring in newcomers, support family reunification, and will leverage the advantage we have on immigration to keep Canada competitive on the world stage.

Extended Analysis

After weeks of rumours and reports of big bold change in the Speech from the Throne, the Liberal government presented a comparatively milder vision of the next Parliamentary session to Canadians. All the Liberal hallmarks were present, including several mentions of supporting the middle class and those working hard to join it, nods to climate change, reconciliation, and systemic racism, and, of course, repeated mentions of the importance of protecting Canadians from the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharp u-turn from big bold change to standard Liberal fare is not surprising, given the increase in COVID-19 cases in recent weeks, and the bad optics of looking like a government capitalizing on its peoples' suffering. There were enough mentions, too, of the importance of working together to suggest that the Liberals are daring the opposition to defeat the government mid-pandemic, and accept all of the blowback that would have come to government had Trudeau decided to call an election himself.

One element that was expected was government's commitment to higher spending, given the low interest rates available to government right now. By extending the CEWS until next summer, developing a new Canada Recovery Benefit, extending the CEBA and BCAP programs, and promising national pharmacare and childcare programs, the Trudeau government is plowing full steam ahead with their spending plans, even without the rumoured basic income program. Look for concerted opposition from the Conservatives on these kinds of spending plans.

On the four foundations of the Speech, the government is trying to keep their best issue facing forward: the COVID-19 pandemic. The government has been praised for their response, and as morbid as it may be, they will use their high public standing on the issue to counter any conservative penny-pinching on the Speech with allegations that they would never have spent enough to keep the country going had they been in government for COVID-19. The Speech certainly makes the point that not a penny less could have been spent to keep Canadians safe. Beyond the pandemic, and the repeated use of Joe Biden's favourite campaign slogan "build back better", the Speech also made cursory mentions of supporting Indigenous peoples, Canadians of colour, and the francophone community. Like their previous Throne Speeches, it is not clear how the Liberals intend to support these communities, but they have committed to committing to try.

Overall, the Speech was disappointing to many progressives eager for serious structural change, and an affront to budget-minded conservatives who want to preserve what we have for future generations. It is no surprise that both the Bloc Quebecois and the Conservatives have already stated they will not support the speech. The question now is, will Jagmeet Singh and the NDP accept the few progressive bones thrown their way, or will they take the gamble of a fresh election and fall right into a Trudeau trap? **Only he knows, but we believe a truism of Throne Speeches holds here: everyone hates it, and then it passes.**

The Opposition Weighs In

After a 54-minute speech that outlined the ambitions of the Liberal government, the opposition parties were quick to weigh in.

With CPC Leader Erin O'Toole still in quarantine with COVID-19, it was left to Deputy Leader of the Opposition Candice Bergen to immediately confirm that the Conservatives would unsurprisingly NOT be supporting the Throne Speech. She said the Tories cannot support the speech because it does not address the major issues of Western alienation or national unity. Bergen said the speech offered little new material and was simply another speech that is full of Liberal buzzwords. Asked if it was responsible to push Canadians closer to an election during a pandemic, Bergen said Canada is a democracy and that the Tories have the right to vote against a speech that fails to address their priorities.

The Bloc Québécois are standing with the Conservatives and have also promised to vote against the speech.

So, in true minority government politics, it comes down to the NDP. Leader Jagmeet Singh told reporters that he had not yet decided how his caucus will vote. "We're going to take a lot of time to consider the throne speech and make sure we evaluate it and make a decision around whether we're supporting or not," he said. Singh says he is concerned Liberal changes that do away with the Canadian emergency relief benefit (CERB) in favour of a revamped Employment Insurance (EI) system will hurt workers who have been forced to stay home because of the pandemic. If Singh and his caucus also vote against the speech, Canadians will be headed to the polls for a fall federal election.

What You Might Have Missed in Today's Speech

With much of the focus on today's Speech from The Throne centering around the mitigation of COVID-19 and the usual promises and investments touted by any government facing an economic crisis, there are a number of targeted and interesting measures included in this Speech that could go unnoticed.

- **The Canadian Disability Benefit:** The government has promised the creation of a Disability Inclusion Plan which would include a "GIS-like" benefit, a robust employment strategy, and a better process for determining eligibility for government disability programs and benefits. The impacts of COVID-19 can be seen across all segments of the population but the response to the pandemic has exasperated barriers that disabled Canadians face daily.
- **Targeted supports for businesses that temporarily shut down:** The government is promising to introduce new financial assistance measures to help businesses who need to temporarily close due to local public health measures. As Canada approaches a possible second wave of infection, there is hope that a more regional and surgical approach to restrictions may be the best way forward. In order to ensure that all businesses have an opportunity to survive the coming months, the government will look at ways of ensuring that businesses affected by a local lockdown will have access to financial supports.

- **Canada-wide early learning and childcare system:** The pandemic has disproportionately affected women and their participation in the workforce. This has been worsened by the complicated situation with childcare and education across the country. Hybrid learning, school outbreaks, and the possibility of being sent home with a runny nose, all but ensure a more precarious environment for parents and caregivers. To address this, the Liberals seem to be shying away from promising universal childcare, but are looking at a federal childcare system as an alternative and more tangible solution.
- **Workers training:** A key pillar of today's speech was ensuring that Canada's economy will build back stronger than it was before the pandemic. To this extent, the government is promising the largest investment in Canadian history to train workers across the country. This will specifically help Canadians develop new skills in growing sectors and assist workers in receiving accreditation and education.
- **Zero-emissions products:** While looking to the future of Canada's economy, it is hard to see an endpoint that does not involve a robust green economy. The government will be introducing a new fund to attract investments in making zero-emission products here in Canada, and they are promising to cut the corporate tax rate in half for companies who create these jobs here in Canada.

Conclusion

With any Throne Speech comes the corresponding confidence vote, and in a minority government such as this, the outcome is far from certain. So, what does your Ensign Team think about the odds of a continuing Liberal government? Considering all the factors, the high spending in the Speech, the opposition from the Bloc and Conservatives, and the vacillating response from the NDP, it seems unlikely that the government is defeated on a confidence vote. The NDP could conceivably support the speech since they have enough political cover given the nods to progressive issues in the Speech, even if the Liberal's new plans are not quite their style. The NDP does get most of their media coverage during elections, which could help their ailing fortunes, but with their poor fiscal position, lack of support in the polls, recent close cooperation with government on EI, and a full-blown pandemic, the NDP likely won't have the courage to defeat the government at this time.

Add in the fact that two by-elections have already been called for October, an election for our southern neighbours, and a general electorate uneasy with COVID and kids going back to school during a second wave, and a fall election seems even more unlikely.

But remember that the average lifespan of a minority government in Canada is 18-months, a marker that this government is getting close to. The Speech may set the direction of the government, but it will be up to newly minted Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland to fund all these priorities, and the chances of a March 2020 budget surviving a confidence measure start looking slim.

ABOUT ENSIGHT

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