



Today's priorities, tomorrow's opportunities

Analysis: Speech from the Throne 2010

Today's Speech from the Throne, entitled 'A Strong Canada. A Strong Economy.', demonstrates the government's recognition that while it must address the country's short-term economic priorities it must also lay out a strategy for Canada's long-term competitiveness.

The details of the government's plans will be provided in tomorrow's Federal Budget. According to the Speech from the Throne the federal government will complete the second year of its economic stimulus commitments under Canada's Economic Action Plan and return Canada to fiscal balance. This has been a core position of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and its network of more than 340 local chambers of commerce and boards nationwide.

In addition to winding down economic stimulus spending by March 31, 2011, the government said it intends to contain its own costs through such measures as freezing the salaries of the Prime Minister, ministers, members of parliament and senators, as well as by freezing ministerial and departmental budgets. The government will also take measures to improve its efficiency through an aggressive review of its administrative services and departmental spending. It will also eliminate unnecessary federal appointments.

The Canadian Chamber has also told the government that while it is critical to eliminate the federal deficit so that it is not left to future generations to shoulder, increasing the tax burden on businesses and consumers will only slow our economic recovery. This is why the government's commitment to balance its books without raising taxes is good news for Canada's businesses and all Canadians.

From the early days of the recession, the Canadian Chamber has said that the government needs to look beyond the recession and equip the Canadian economy to "hit the ground running" in the global economy. We are heartened to see that longer-term initiatives for which the Canadian Chamber has advocated were reflected as priorities in the Speech from the Throne. These include the government's commitment to a strategy for a digital economy, strengthening intellectual property rights and copyright protection, fostering innovation by expanding opportunities for the commercialization of research and post-doctoral studies, as well as ensuring the country has the skilled workforce it needs through improving the education and training opportunities for Aboriginal Canadians. The Canadian Chamber also looks forward to the re-introduction of an amended spam bill that works for business and consumers.

The importance of the economic contribution made by Canada's small and medium-sized businesses and the need to reduce the regulatory burdens they face, were specifically acknowledged.

The need to expand the scope of Canada's international trade, fight trade protectionism, increase the amount of capital available to Canada's businesses by lifting foreign ownership restrictions in key sectors, negotiating new air agreements and the creation of a national securities regulator have long been forwarded by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce as measures to make us more competitive.

Dealing with climate change remains a real challenge for Canada. We welcome the continued recognition that this must be done in a manner that acknowledges our economic integration with the United States.

The Canadian Chamber is particularly pleased to see the government acknowledge the need to improve the regulatory oversight and project approvals regime for environmental and energy projects. This was outlined in the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's 2009 policy paper *Powering Up Canadian Prosperity* as being one of the essential steps government must take to enable Canada to fully leverage its energy sector's potential.

Tomorrow (March 4), the Canadian Chamber of Commerce will issue its detailed analysis of the Federal Budget with an accompanying news release, available from chamber.ca.