



OCT. 28 OCT. 2020
SESSIONAL PAPER
DOCUMENT PARLEMENTAIRE
8560-432-1261-01
HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES

Report to Parliament: August 2020 Prorogation - COVID-19 pandemic

OCTOBER 2020

Introduction:

Pursuant to Standing Order 32(7), this report shall set out the reasons for the recent prorogation of Parliament.

In 2015, our government committed to changing the Standing Orders to ensure that ours and future federal governments remain transparent with Canadians in all aspects of governance, including the use of prorogation. This report is intended to provide parliamentarians, and all Canadians, with greater clarity about why our government prorogued Parliament in August 2020.

Prior to 2015, prorogation had been used by the previous government as a tool to further what many Canadians believed were purely political outcomes. For example, in 2008, as the country was experiencing the devastating effects of a global financial crisis, the government of the day prorogued to avoid a confidence vote that could potentially have caused its fall.

Our government's Speech from the Throne in December 2019, following the October election, set out a number of important commitments. These included, but were not limited to, achieving net-zero emissions by 2050; legislating the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; furthering free and fair trade, and investing in affordable housing across the country.

While these remain core commitments, it became clear in the first half of 2020 that the 2019 Speech from the Throne – through which our government had obtained the confidence of Members of Parliament in the House of Commons – no longer represented the context in which we would govern. The cause of this upheaval, of course, was the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 Pandemic:

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic, the impacts of which were felt immediately and worldwide, including in Canada. Schools and businesses were closed. Within days, Canada's borders were closed to the world. And millions of Canadian families faced a frightening situation in which they were uncertain of how they would pay rent, mortgages and bills, or put food on the table.

In March alone, Canada's Gross Domestic Product contracted by 7.2 per cent and more than a million jobs were lost. In April, there was a further drop of 11.6 per cent, with 1.99 million jobs lost. Millions of Canadians now faced dire financial straits, in addition to concerns about their health and that of their loved ones.

We took early and significant actions to support our health care systems across the country. On March 11, the Prime Minister announced \$500 million for provinces and territories to support our critical health care systems, and to provide access to testing, the acquisition of equipment, and to enhance monitoring of the virus.

Working with unprecedented speed, the Government of Canada introduced emergency programs to mitigate the harm to Canadian families and businesses alike. Canada entered this crisis with a strong balance sheet, the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, and historically low borrowing rates, giving our government the ability to respond to the immediate needs of Canadians with decisive action.

Through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, more than 8.9 million unique applicants have received the support they needed to safely stay home and help slow the spread of the virus. For low-income essential workers, our true pandemic heroes, we worked with the provinces and territories to create a \$3 billion wage top-up program. So families would have more money in their pockets to weather this crisis, we introduced a one-time Goods and Services Tax (GST) Credit – on average, giving single adults almost \$400, and couples almost \$600 – as well as a special one-time \$300 top-up of the Canada Child Benefit.

It was clear from the outset that certain groups within our country were disproportionately affected by this crisis. That's why for our seniors, we put in place an OAS and GIS top-up, and for Canadians living with disabilities, we brought forward a one-time, tax-free payment of \$600. We invested to support Canada's food banks, help community partners address the shelter and safety needs of people experiencing homelessness, and introduced support for over 500 women's shelters and sexual assault centres.

Working with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners, we have invested \$2.2 billion to build on community-led solutions to support an immediate public health, social, and economic response to the pandemic in Indigenous communities. And for students, who faced a very different job market this past summer, we created the Canada Emergency Student Benefit, which provided income support to over 700,000 students and recent graduates.

Through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, more than 3.7 million people have had their jobs supported, as their employers have been able to continue providing them a pay cheque. Our government worked collaboratively with the House of Commons and the Senate, to facilitate passage of these vital measures.

To ensure Canada's small, medium, and large size businesses across all sectors could stay afloat, we created further measures that would save jobs and keep businesses' doors open. These include the Business Credit Availability Program and support for local jobs and regional economies across Canada through each of Canada's six Regional Development Agencies. Additionally, the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance for Small Businesses has helped over 137,000 small businesses pay their rent.

In response to this crisis, our government stepped up quickly, as did industry. From the outset, Canada's strategy has been to aggressively procure personal protective equipment in a highly competitive global marketplace, while at the same time, diversifying our supply chains with domestic suppliers. Since March, we have received approximately 2 billion masks, gloves, gowns, and face shields to protect front line workers and people across the country.

To help Canada fight COVID-19, the Government of Canada encouraged businesses and manufacturers to assist in meeting the need for medical supplies and equipment. More than 6,000 companies reached out to ask how they could help. It resulted in Canadian companies retooling their facilities and increasing their production capacity, collecting and donating existing supplies and equipment, and combining resources to help manufacture made in Canada supplies.

We have told Canadians that when a vaccine is ready, Canada will be ready. That is why, early on in the pandemic, we invested \$1.4 billion to support COVID-19 medical research and vaccine development, and established the COVID-19 Immunity Task Force.

From the start, it was clear that the public-health and economic crises were inextricably linked. It is why we introduced the \$19 billion Safe Restart Agreement to help provinces and territories safely restart their economies and make our country more resilient to possible future surges of COVID-19.

This support meant provinces and territories could increase testing and contact tracing, better support the capacity of our health care systems, including with mental health supports, assist with the procurement of personal protective equipment to help our essential workers, and protect the most vulnerable like our seniors. Only by first defeating the virus could Canadians restore a healthy, vibrant economy and job market.

Due to this unprecedented national effort, Canadians had effectively flattened the curve by the summer months. But the battle against COVID-19 was and remains far from over. On August 17, the day before prorogation, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam, noted:

Our efforts indicate that we are keeping COVID-19 spread under manageable control but the virus is still circulating in Canada and we must not let down our guard. The shape of our national epidemic curve over time, including what impact COVID-19 might have this fall, will be influenced by our collective commitment and actions to keep infection rates low.

That same day, after seeing a single day high of 1,104 cases in April, Quebec reported only 55 new cases, while Ontario recorded its second straight day of fewer than 100 new cases. The Atlantic Provinces and the Territories were continuing to win their battle against the virus. Despite the success in some parts of our country, other provinces that had seen success were experiencing new challenges. British Columbia reported its highest daily COVID-19 case number to that point on August 17, and the City of Edmonton moved onto Alberta's "watch list." At that point there had been more than 122,000 reported cases of COVID-19 across the country, and more than 9,000 families had lost loved ones.

Though Canada's Gross Domestic Product recovered in May by 4.8 per cent, and in June by 6.5 per cent, the pace of growth slackened in July, and again in August. Indeed, as of August, 1.8 million Canadian workers continued to be affected by the COVID-19 economic shutdown, including more than a million whose jobs were lost and some 700,000 people still coping with reduced hours.

Moreover, despite the success in flattening the curve in some regions of Canada, and our work to prepare for the fall, it was already clear in August that the colder months would bring new and more difficult challenges, for which we needed to prepare. Medical experts from across Canada made it clear that the question was not whether there would be a second wave, but how bad it would be. It was anticipated that some parts of the country would have to return to lockdown, costing more Canadians their jobs, and that, tragically, more of our fellow Canadians would sicken and die.

Five and a half months into this pandemic – the greatest challenge Canadians have faced since the Second World War – the people of Canada deserved to know that the federal government had a bold and comprehensive plan to get them through whatever challenge would come next.

They also deserved to know that the government and all parliamentarians elected on their behalf would continue to stand up and support them in their time of need.

In order for this to be the case, our government was duty-bound and honour-bound to ensure we had the continued confidence of the House of Commons. We needed to outline a clear, realistic plan on which parliamentarians would have the opportunity to vote. This was the only clear and transparent way to ensure that the federal government could continue to provide the support on which Canadians were relying.

Prorogation:

On August 18, the Prime Minister spoke directly to Canadians about prorogation, acknowledging the hard work and dedication that had been required to get to this point, but also stating clearly that we were not out of the woods:

Right now, the world is at a crossroads; Canada is at a crossroads. As economies relaunch, we're seeing COVID-19 reappear in places like Australia and New Zealand. It's their winter right now, but ours is still ahead. We have to be vigilant, because we've worked too hard and sacrificed too much to go backwards. The fight is still far from over.

While clearly addressing the grim reality of the virus, the Prime Minister also spoke to Canadians about the long-standing challenges COVID-19 had laid bare for far too many Canadians. In this vein, the Prime Minister said:

This is our chance to build a more resilient Canada; a Canada that is healthier and safer, greener and more competitive. A Canada that is more welcoming and more fair. This is our moment to change the future for the better. We can't afford to miss it, because this window of opportunity won't be open for long.

In order to demonstrate to Canadians how their government intended to continue to support them through the pandemic, a reset was necessary. Moreover, it was imperative that Parliamentarians vote on that plan. As the Prime Minister said on August 18:

We are proroguing parliament to bring it back on exactly the same week it was supposed to come back anyway and force a confidence vote. We are taking a moment to recognize that the throne speech we delivered eight months ago had no mention of COVID-19; had no conception of the reality we find ourselves in right now. We need to reset the approach of this government for a recovery to build back better. And those are big important decisions, and we need to present that to Parliament and gain the confidence of Parliament to move forward on this ambitious plan. The prorogation we are doing right now is about gaining or testing the confidence of the House...

In the weeks that followed, and in the lead-up to the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister and the government were hard at work, crafting this plan. At the same time, we continued working with provincial and territorial partners to ensure that as parts of our economy and communities re-opened, they would do so safely.

Central to that were our schools. This is why we stepped up with the \$2 billion Safe Return to Class Fund. It is also why we announced we would continue supporting Canadians who were not able to work due to COVID.

As part of this plan, we announced a transition from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit to a more flexible, accessible EI system, and a plan to support those who are not eligible for EI, through further targeted recovery benefits. These benefits will be in place until summer 2021, giving Canadians the confidence to make the right choices for their health, and better positioning our economy to recover. Legislation to support the introduction of those benefits was introduced in the first week Parliament returned; the same week it would have returned had there not been a prorogation.

During this time, we also continued to step up our efforts to secure vaccine candidates. Now, Canada has one of the largest and most diverse vaccine candidate portfolios in the world. We have now secured access for Canadians to seven leading vaccine candidates: AstraZeneca, Sanofi and GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson & Johnson, Novavax, Pfizer, Moderna, and Medicigo.

While working on the Speech from the Throne, we listened carefully to Canadians and heard what they had to say - from community leaders, labour groups, employers and individuals. We knew this would need to be a plan that responded to the immediate, continuing challenge of COVID-19, while also addressing the need for long-term, systemic reforms to make life fairer and more equitable for all.

We took the time to carefully listen and critically assess our efforts to date. While it was clear these programs and policies prevented Canadians from taking on more personal debt and businesses from closing up shop, we recognized more could be done. Programs could be retooled to better suit evolving needs. For example, we heard from leaders in the business community that the rent relief program could be improved and more accessible if tenants could access support directly.

We knew our plan would need to get us not just through the weeks and months ahead, but even further down the road. This gave us the time we needed to do exactly that: to build a robust, responsive, and comprehensive approach to the challenges we knew were ahead, but also for all that was still unknown.

Speech from the Throne:

On September 23, the Governor General presented the Speech from the Throne. The first pillar of the Speech included measures to continue to battle the pandemic and save lives. The Speech included a commitment to pursue every available technology and every possible option to obtain faster COVID-19 tests for Canadians, and to have them deployed as soon as they are deemed safe for Canadians.

We also recognized that local, provincial and territorial jurisdictions might decide to impose further shutdowns, in the interest of public safety. To help ease the impact, we announced that we would implement additional financial supports specifically for businesses required to temporarily shut down as a result of a local public health decision.

In the few weeks since the Speech from the Throne, our government has delivered on both fronts. We announced that Abbott Rapid Diagnostics ULC will supply up to 7.9 million ID NOW rapid tests, and up to 20.5 million Panbio COVID-19 Antigen rapid tests. On October 21, Canada received the first delivery of 100,000 Abbott ID NOW rapid tests, with more on the way.

And, to help businesses weather the storm, we announced a new Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy; a top-up Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy of 25 per cent for organizations temporarily shut down by a mandatory public health order issued by a qualifying public health authority; the extension of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy until June 2021; and an expanded Canada Emergency Business Account.

Job one for our government is to keep Canadians safe and protect Canadian jobs.

That is why we are pursuing every available avenue to procure vaccines, therapeutics, and personal protective equipment, as we help provinces and territories ramp up their testing. We know that economic recovery and public health go hand in hand. Our government will continue to invest as needed. We will do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to help Canadians through this crisis.

At the same time, we know this pandemic has exposed fundamental gaps in our social safety net. We can and must change this. We are committed to building a more just society, as we build a stronger and more resilient economy.

That is why the Speech from the Throne outlined a plan to create one million jobs, as we protect those who are most vulnerable. For those who are unable to find work in the coming months, the EI system will become the sole delivery mechanism for employment benefits. That includes Canadians who formerly did not qualify for EI.

The supports for workers, businesses, and Canadians – and the length of time they will be in place – will ensure Canadians can continue to make the right decisions for their health, their communities, and their loved ones. They will also allow governments at the local, provincial, and

territorial levels to make necessary but difficult choices that will save lives. And as we move forward, the security these supports will provide will mean we can recover faster and stronger.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been described as a setback. We must not allow the pandemic to turn back the clock on women's participation in the workforce. Nor will we accept backtracking on the social and political gains women and their allies have fought so hard to secure.

That is why the Speech from the Throne includes a commitment to a long-term, sustained investment in early learning and childcare. Our government will build on previous investments, learn from the model that already exists in Quebec, and work with all provinces and territories to ensure that high-quality care is accessible to all.

For Canadian seniors, who have suffered more than any other group from this pandemic, we committed to Criminal Code amendments to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under their care. This is in addition to working with the provinces and territories to set new, national standards for long-term care. This will ensure seniors receive the best support possible, and are able to live longer in their own homes.

For Canadians with disabilities, we will introduce a Disability Inclusion Plan, including a new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors; a robust employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities; and a better process to determine eligibility for government disability programs and benefits.

This pandemic presents an opportunity to rebuild in a stronger, more resilient and inclusive way. We intend to ensure that every Canadian can participate in society to their full potential. That includes by furthering progress on reconciliation, fighting systemic racism, and protecting Canada's two official languages.

Despite our present challenges, we cannot and will not ignore the need for serious, effective and long-term climate action. This will be a cornerstone of our plan to build a cleaner and more

competitive Canada, and will help and create a million jobs across the country. It will include retrofitting homes and buildings; delivering more transit and active transit options; making zero-emission vehicles more affordable, while investing in more charging stations across the country; and moving forward with the Clean Power Fund, including projects such as the Atlantic Loop.

This is the ambitious agenda our government put forward in the Speech from the Throne. It won support from the House of Commons on October 6, 2020. Bill C-4, an extension and expansion of vitally needed economic support measures for Canadians, received unanimous support from all parties in the House of Commons, on September 30, 2020.

Moving Forward:

The second wave of the pandemic is now, regrettably, underway. Multiple provinces have now surpassed the daily new case counts they recorded last spring. In Quebec, daily case numbers have recently exceeded one thousand. A growing number of businesses have had to shut their doors. Ontario has also seen a very worrying increase, with a recent average number of cases in the 800s, and has re-imposed restrictions on gatherings and openings in Toronto, Peel, Ottawa and York Region. New Brunswick has seen outbreaks, including in care homes. We also continue to see a rise in cases in vulnerable communities, with over 1,000 cases linked to First Nation communities, and growing numbers in our long-term care facilities. Beyond new cases, we also see more families losing loved ones due to the resurgence of the virus.

As Canadians, we collectively have the power to bring this second wave of the virus under control. But we must all do our part. Canadians should feel confident that they can rely on their government, just as they can rely on one another.

In ensuring our government continues to have the confidence of the House, we ensured that we can continue to deliver the support Canadians require and expect, both today and in the days, weeks, months and years to come. Beyond the immediate public health response, we required the support of the House of Commons to build a stronger, fairer and more inclusive Canada. This

means a Canada that works for all Canadians, including racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples, young people, women, low-income workers and Canadians living with disabilities.

We have sought and obtained the confidence of the House for this bold plan. We will continue working with Parliament to deliver that plan for Canadians.

Conclusion:

In considering the challenges immediately before us, the experience from the first wave behind us, and the hard work still ahead, it was very clear in August that we needed to reset the agenda and obtain the confidence of the House, in order to move forward.

This having been accomplished, Canadians can now feel confident their federal government has a solid plan, and one that has support from the House of Commons.

Our job now is to follow through on our commitments to Canadians; to help keep them healthy, safe and solvent, as we battle the second wave of the virus. Our job is also to build a Canada that is more resilient and equitable for all.

This is the work we look forward to doing with parliamentarians in the 2nd session of the 43rd Parliament.

Annex 1: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Remarks on Prorogation – August 18, 2020

Annex 2: Speech from the Throne – September 23, 2020

Annex 1: Prime Minister provides an update on changes to the Ministry, and Parliament announcement (Check against delivery)

Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you for joining us.

Yesterday, I accepted Bill Morneau's resignation as Minister of Finance. For almost 5 years, Bill has worked tirelessly on behalf of all Canadians to build a strong, resilient economy that works for everyone.

I want to thank Bill for his outstanding service as Minister of Finance and as the Member of Parliament for Toronto Centre. No matter his next steps, I know he will continue to make important contributions to our country in the years to come.

Earlier today, I was at Rideau Hall to make a few changes to our Cabinet.

Chrystia Freeland is now Canada's Minister of Finance, and will remain Deputy Prime Minister. Dominic LeBlanc is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and continues to serve as the President of the Queen's Privy Council of Canada.

In the weeks and months to come, their work will be more important than ever.

Right now, the world is at a crossroads. Canada is at a crossroads.

As economies relaunch, we're seeing COVID-19 reappear in places like Australia and New Zealand. It's their winter right now, but ours is still ahead.

We have to be vigilant, because we have worked too hard and sacrificed too much to go backwards.

This fight is still far from over.

Just take the fact that some provinces are seeing new cases after weeks of declining numbers.

For parents especially, this is a big worry in terms of the school year.

I hear that. As a dad, I'm concerned about this too.

Provincial leaders have a responsibility to make sure that our kids are safe in their classrooms.

As federal government, we'll do whatever we can to help, including through our \$19 billion Safe Restart Agreement.

But of course, it's not just school that's on people's minds.

While many Canadians are back at work, the unemployment rate is still in the double digits. It's tough for all Canadians, but we have to remember that it's those who were already struggling who are hardest hit.

Women are facing impossible choices between kids and career.

Racialized Canadians and Indigenous people are confronting extra barriers.

Young people are dealing with unexpected burdens as they worry about their future.

It will take time to make up the economic ground we've lost to this pandemic. It will take hard work to fix these gaps.

This pandemic has taught us some important lessons.

It has highlighted some inequalities that still exist today and the vulnerabilities we have as a society. But Canada is not alone.

Around the world, a consensus is emerging that the time has come to think boldly and rebuild even stronger.

Advanced economies understand that with very low interest rates, borrowing costs are also very low to help stimulate the recovery.

Countries like Canada that have a strong fiscal position must invest to help people get through this crisis.

Our G7 allies – whether it is Germany or the United Kingdom, or our partners like the European Union or South Korea – they all understand that this is a time to act.

And we must seize the opportunity as well.

We have a choice to make.

We can decide to move forward instead of returning to the status quo.

We can choose to embrace bold new solutions to the challenges we face, and refuse to be held back by old ways of thinking.

As much as this pandemic is an unexpected challenge, it is also an unprecedented opportunity.

This is our chance to build a more resilient Canada: a Canada that is healthier and safer, greener and more competitive. A Canada that is more welcoming and more fair.

This is our moment to change the future for the better.

We can't afford to miss it, because this window of opportunity won't be open for long.

We've supported Canadians with a huge emergency response to make sure everyone could cope during this time.

We've carefully – and successfully – reopened many parts of the economy.

And now, we also need to look to the future.

We need long-term solutions that address the shortfalls in healthcare that meant soldiers were caring for seniors.

We need good, middle class jobs that can withstand the challenges of tomorrow.

We need to get through this pandemic in a way that gives everyone a real and fair chance at success, not just the wealthiest 1%.

In other words, we need a long-term plan for recovery.

A plan that addresses, head on, the fundamental gaps this pandemic has unmasked.

In the coming weeks, we will present our plan to rebuild a stronger, more resilient Canada. This will be our roadmap out of the pandemic towards a society that is fairer and more welcoming.

Towards communities that are prepared for future crises. And towards a country where everyone is safer and healthier.

As our first step to make this plan a reality, we will present a Speech from the Throne on Wednesday, September 23rd. This is the same week that the House of Commons was already

scheduled to return. The Throne speech will give us the opportunity to lay out, in detail, our approach going forward. It will also allow Parliament to hold a confidence vote on this new plan. Today, I have asked the Governor General to prorogue Parliament, which must happen before any government can present a Throne speech.

I want to be clear. Whether you're counting on the CERB or EI while you look for work, or on the wage subsidy to keep employees on the job – these programs will not be affected by prorogation.

In fact, starting a new session of Parliament is about creating sustainable ways to support you moving forward. That has always been our number one focus, and it always will be.

Eight months ago, our government introduced a plan to address the issues that matter most to Canadians.

This plan was designed for a different Canada, one before COVID. Since then, our reality has changed, as has our approach.

Parliament must support a new agenda that responds to the new world in which we live.

Canadians expect us to work together at times like this.

We are ready to do our part, to get Parliament's support for our plan for a more resilient Canada.

A plan that allows us to remain vigilant and keep the virus under control.

A plan that invests in Canadians.

A plan for a better future.

We have lots of work ahead of us in the weeks and months to come. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister LeBlanc – who have taken on new roles today – are the people we need for the job, along with the rest of our outstanding team. I'm looking forward to the challenges the coming months will bring.

Thank you.

Annex 2: Speech from the Throne to open the Second Session of the Forty-Third Parliament of Canada

Honourable Senators,

Members of the House of Commons,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Every day on our shared planet, millions face hardships that test the human spirit. Extreme weather, wildfires, poverty, conflicts, discrimination, and inequalities. Rarely though, has all of humanity faced a single common insidious enemy. An invisible enemy that respects no borders, thrives anywhere, hits anyone.

To overcome a pandemic requires the work and resolve of every order of government, every community, and every one of us.

We don't decide when hardship comes, but here in Canada, we have decided how we wanted to address it. We have adapted in remarkable ways.

We Canadians did our part. We changed our habits, postponed our plans, switched to teleworking or had to completely reinvent our work, all this, while caring for one another.

We owe an immense debt to those who served and still serve on the frontlines, to health care personnel and essential workers, women and men in uniform, volunteers and leaders, everywhere in the country.

There has been a lot of suffering and we all mourn those who have passed.

We trust science to lead the fight until a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. But until then, we must keep our guard up, using the tools that are available to us now – such as testing, treatments and physical distancing measures.

Like a reed in high winds, we might sway but we will not break. Because our roots are firmly in place, our goals clear, and because we have hope – the hope that lifts the soul on dark days and keeps us focused on the future.

Canadians have lived through uncertain times before and have always prevailed because determination, concern for others, courage, and common sense define our nation.

We must bring all those qualities to bear once again and continue to work for the common good, and for a better, safer, and more just society.

This is who we are and what will see us through to brighter days.

Opening

For over 150 years, Parliamentarians have worked together to chart Canada's path forward.

Your predecessors met when Confederation was only a few months old, setting the course for a young country. They stood united through Canada's toughest days, leading the nation through wars and depression. And as they did, each Parliamentarian was called to meet their times.

Today, Canadians expect you to do the same. They expect you to work together on their behalf and meet this crucial moment.

Less than a year ago, we gathered here for a Throne Speech to open the 43rd Parliament. Since then, our realities have changed. And so must our approach.

This pandemic is the most serious public health crisis Canada has ever faced.

Over 9,000 Canadians have died in six months. For our neighbours in the United States, this figure is over 200,000. Globally, it's nearly a million.

But these aren't just numbers. These are friends and family. Neighbours and colleagues.

The pandemic is the story of parents who have died alone, without loved ones to hold their hand.

It is the story of kids who have gone months without seeing friends.

Of workers who have lost their jobs.

The last six months have laid bare fundamental gaps in our society, and in societies around the world. This pandemic has been hard for everyone. But for those who were already struggling, the burden has been even heavier.

For parents – and especially moms – who are facing impossible choices between kids and career.

For racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples who are confronted by systemic barriers.

For young people who are worried about what their future will hold.

For seniors who are isolated, frightened, and most at risk.

And for workers who, while earning the lowest wages in the most precarious sectors, have been on the frontlines of the pandemic.

We must address these challenges of today. But we also cannot forget about the tests of the future.

The world came into this pandemic facing the risks and consequences of climate change. A lesson that COVID-19 has taught us, is that we need to match challenges with decisiveness and determination.

On all of these fronts – health and the economy, equality, and the environment – we must take bold action.

The Government will meet these challenges.

The Government's approach will have four foundations.

The first foundation of this plan is to fight the pandemic and save lives.

The second foundation of the Government's plan is supporting people and businesses through this crisis as long as it lasts, whatever it takes. Effectively dealing with the health crisis is the best thing we can do for the economy. Government action has already helped Canadians stay safe, and buffered the worst economic impacts.

The third foundation is to build back better to create a stronger, more resilient Canada. To do this, we must keep strengthening the middle class and helping people working hard to join it, and continue creating jobs and building long-term competitiveness with clean growth. We must also keep building safer communities for everyone.

The fourth and final foundation of this plan is to stand up for who we are as Canadians. We cannot forget what has made us a country that is welcoming. A country that celebrates two official languages. That achieves progress on gender equality, walks the road of reconciliation, and fights discrimination of every kind.

This is our generation's crossroads.

Do we move Canada forward, or let people be left behind? Do we come out of this stronger, or paper over the cracks that the crisis has exposed?

This is the time to remember who we are as Canadians.

This is the opportunity to contain the global crisis and build back better, together.

Protecting Canadians from COVID-19

The first foundation of the Government's approach is protecting Canadians from COVID-19.

This is priority number one.

It is the job of the federal government to look out for all Canadians and especially our most vulnerable. We need to work together. Beating this virus is a Team Canada effort.

Over the last six months, Canadians have stood united and strong. Their actions embody what has always been the purpose of the federal government: bringing Canadians together to achieve common goals.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) has been shipped across the country. Members of the Canadian Forces were there in long-term care homes. Close to 9 million Canadians were helped with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and over 3.5 million jobs were supported by the wage subsidy.

The Government will continue to have people's backs just like Canadians have each other's backs.

Through the first wave, contact tracing and testing ramped up across the country. The surge this fall further reinforces what we already know – that we must do even more.

The federal government will be there to help the provinces increase their testing capacity. Canadians should not be waiting in line for hours to get a test.

At the same time, the Government is pursuing every technology and every option for faster tests for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. As soon as tests are approved for safe use in Canada, the Government will do everything it can to see them deployed. The Government will also create a federal Testing Assistance Response Team to quickly meet surge testing needs, including in remote and isolated communities.

Local public health authorities are the backbone of our nation's efforts to stop outbreaks before they start. As members of the communities they protect, they know the devastating economic impact a lockdown order can have.

To prevent small clusters from becoming major outbreaks, communities may need to enact short-term closure orders. To make that decision easier for the public health authorities, and to help ease the impact that science- and evidence-based decisions can have on local businesses in the short term, the Government will work to target additional financial support directly to businesses which have to temporarily shut down as a result of a local public health decision.

This will ensure that decisions are made with the health of Canadians as the first priority.

The Government will also continue to work on what communities need more broadly.

The Government has already invested over \$19 billion for a Safe Restart Agreement with provinces and territories, to support everything from the capacity of health care systems to securing PPE.

To address the challenges faced by provinces and territories as they reopen classrooms, the federal government invested \$2 billion in the Safe Return to Class Fund, along with new funding

for First Nations communities. This is money to keep kids – and staff – safe in the classroom, whether that’s by helping schools buy cleaning supplies or upgrade ventilation.

These commitments build on federal investments to support people who are most at risk and those who care for them, including with the federal wage top-up for personal support workers. People on the frontlines who have been looking after seniors do vital work and the Government will continue to have their backs.

At the same time, the Government will continue to support Canadians as they take action to keep each other safe.

Already, people are doing their part by wearing masks. That’s important, and we can build on that commitment. Working with private sector partners, the federal government created the COVID Alert app. Canadians living in Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan now have an extra tool to keep themselves and others safe. The Government hopes all the others will sign on so that people in all parts of the country can both do their part and be better protected.

The Government will also continue to work on getting Canadians the PPE they need.

This spring, the Government issued a call, and thousands of Canadian businesses and manufacturers responded. From shop floors to companies big and small, Canada’s dynamic businesses met the challenge as their workers stepped up.

And in less than six months, Canadians are now manufacturing almost all types of PPE. The Government will continue building that domestic capacity, while securing supply chains to keep Canadians safe and create jobs.

Canadians are pulling together, whether that’s with PPE manufacturing, through the COVID Alert app, or by wearing a mask. In the same way, Canadian researchers and scientists are pitching in to the Team Canada effort with their knowledge and expertise.

Vaccine efforts

In the long run, the best way to end this pandemic is with a safe and effective vaccine.

Canada’s vaccine strategy is all about ensuring that Canadians will be able to get a vaccine once it is ready.

There are many types of potential candidates. Canada is exploring the full range of options. The Government has already secured access to vaccine candidates and therapeutics, while investing

in manufacturing here at home. And to get the vaccines out to Canadians once they're ready, the Government has made further investments in our capacity for vaccine distribution.

From the Vaccine Task Force that provides the best advice on vaccine purchasing and roll-out, to the Immunity Task Force looking at how COVID-19 is affecting vulnerable populations, Canada's top scientific minds are guiding the Government every step of the way.

Helping Canadians through the pandemic

The medical and scientific fight against this virus is crucial. And so are the livelihoods of every single Canadian, worker, and family.

So the second foundation of the Government's approach is supporting Canadians through this crisis.

The economic impact of COVID-19 on Canadians has already been worse than the 2008 financial crisis. These consequences will not be short-lived.

This is not the time for austerity. Canada entered this crisis in the best fiscal position of its peers.

And the Government is using that fiscal firepower, on things like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), so that Canadians, businesses, and our entire economy have the support needed to weather the storm.

Canadians should not have to choose between health and their job, just like Canadians should not have to take on debt that their government can better shoulder.

Creating jobs

People losing their jobs is perhaps the clearest consequence of the global economic shock that Canadians – like those in other countries – have faced.

The CERB helped people stay healthy at home while being able to keep food on the table.

The CEWS helped people keep their jobs, or be rehired if they had been laid off.

But there is still more to be done.

Unemployment is in the double digits, and underemployment is high.

Women, racialized Canadians, and young people have borne the brunt of job losses.

Canadians need good jobs they can rely on.

To help make that happen, the Government will launch a campaign to create over one million jobs, restoring employment to previous levels. This will be done by using a range of tools, including direct investments in the social sector and infrastructure, immediate training to quickly skill up workers, and incentives for employers to hire and retain workers.

One way the Government will create these jobs is by extending the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy right through to next summer. The Government will work with businesses and labour to ensure the program meets the needs of the health and economic situation as it evolves.

Another example of how the Government will create jobs is by significantly scaling up the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, to provide more paid work experiences next year for young Canadians.

Now, more than ever, Canadians must work together – including by eliminating remaining barriers between provinces to full, free internal trade – to get the economy back up and running and Canadians back to work.

Supporting workers and their families

With the job losses that Canadians have faced, it became clear early on that many people would need help until they could find work once again. But existing income support systems were not designed to handle this unprecedented situation. That's why the Government moved quickly to create the Canada Emergency Response Benefit as a temporary program to help millions of Canadians get through a very difficult time.

With the economic restart now well underway, CERB recipients should instead be supported by the Employment Insurance system. For people who would not traditionally qualify for EI, the Government will create the transitional Canada Recovery Benefit.

Over the coming months, the EI system will become the sole delivery mechanism for employment benefits, including for Canadians who did not qualify for EI before the pandemic. This pandemic has shown that Canada needs an EI system for the 21st century, including for the self-employed and those in the gig economy.

Women in the Economy

Women – and in particular low-income women – have been hit hardest by COVID-19. This crisis has been described as a she-cession.

Many women have bravely served on the frontlines of this crisis, in our communities or by shouldering the burden of unpaid care work at home.

We must not let the legacy of the pandemic be one of rolling back the clock on women's participation in the workforce, nor one of backtracking on the social and political gains women and allies have fought so hard to secure.

The Government will create an Action Plan for Women in the Economy to help more women get back into the workforce and to ensure a feminist, intersectional response to this pandemic and recovery. This Plan will be guided by a task force of experts whose diverse voices will power a whole-of-government approach.

It has been nearly 50 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women outlined the necessity of childcare services for women's social and economic equality. We have long understood that Canada cannot succeed if half of the population is held back. Canadians need more accessible, affordable, inclusive, and high quality childcare.

Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, the Government will make a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system.

The Government will build on previous investments, learn from the model that already exists in Quebec, and work with all provinces and territories to ensure that high-quality care is accessible to all.

There is broad consensus from all parts of society, including business and labour leaders, that the time is now.

The Government also remains committed to subsidizing before- and after-school program costs. With the way that this pandemic has affected parents and families, flexible care options for primary school children are more important than ever.

The Government will also accelerate the Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy, which has already helped women across Canada grow their businesses.

Supporting businesses

As the Government invests in people, it will continue to support job-creating businesses.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of communities and the backbone of the economy. The Government introduced a range of supports for Canadian businesses, from help with payroll through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy to assistance with expenses through interest-free loans.

COVID-19 has caused businesses across the country, both large and small, to rethink their approaches. Entrepreneurs and owners are looking at more digital options, more creative solutions, and more climate-friendly investments.

The Government will help businesses adapt for the future and thrive.

This fall, in addition to extending the wage subsidy, the Government will take further steps to bridge vulnerable businesses to the other side of the pandemic by:

Expanding the Canada Emergency Business Account to help businesses with fixed costs;

Improving the Business Credit Availability Program;

And introducing further support for industries that have been the hardest hit, including travel and tourism, hospitality, and cultural industries like the performing arts.

Fiscal sustainability

This COVID-19 emergency has had huge costs. But Canada would have had a deeper recession and a bigger long-term deficit if the Government had done less.

With interest rates so low, central banks can only do so much to help. There is a global consensus that governments must do more. Government can do so while also locking in the low cost of borrowing for decades to come. This Government will preserve Canada's fiscal advantage and continue to be guided by values of sustainability and prudence.

There are two distinct needs.

The first is to help Canadians in the short term, to do whatever it takes, using whatever fiscal firepower is needed to support people and businesses during the pandemic. The best way to keep the economy strong is to keep Canadians healthy.

The second need is to build back better, with a sustainable approach for future generations. As the Government builds a plan for stimulus and recovery, this must be done responsibly.

In the longer term, the Government will focus on targeted investments to strengthen the middle class, build resiliency, and generate growth. The Government will also identify additional ways to tax extreme wealth inequality, including by concluding work to limit the stock option deduction for wealthy individuals at large, established corporations, and addressing corporate tax avoidance by digital giants.

Web giants are taking Canadians' money while imposing their own priorities. Things must change, and will change. The Government will act to ensure their revenue is shared more fairly with our creators and media, and will also require them to contribute to the creation, production, and distribution of our stories, on screen, in lyrics, in music, and in writing.

This fall, the Government will release an update to Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. This will outline the Government's economic and fiscal position, provide fiscal projections, and set out new measures to implement this Throne Speech.

This update will make clear that the strength of the middle class, and the wellbeing of all Canadians, remain Canada's key measures of success.

Building back better – a resiliency agenda for the middle class

As we fight for every Canadian and defend everyone's ability to succeed, we also need to focus on the future, and on building back better. This forms the third foundation of the Government's approach.

Around the world, advanced economies are realizing that things should not go back to business as usual. COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerabilities in our societies.

The Government will create a resiliency agenda for the middle class and people working hard to join it.

This will include addressing the gaps in our social systems, investing in health care, and creating jobs. It will also include fighting climate change, and maintaining a commitment to fiscal sustainability and economic growth as the foundation of a strong and vibrant society.

Addressing gaps in our social systems

Central to this is recognizing that one of the greatest tragedies of this pandemic is the lives lost in long-term care homes. Elders deserve to be safe, respected, and live in dignity.

Although long-term care falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, the federal government will take any action it can to support seniors while working alongside the provinces and territories.

The Government will work with Parliament on Criminal Code amendments to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under their care, putting them in danger.

The Government will also:

Work with the provinces and territories to set new, national standards for long-term care so that seniors get the best support possible;

And take additional action to help people stay in their homes longer.

The Government remains committed to increasing Old Age Security once a senior turns 75, and boosting the Canada Pension Plan survivor's benefit.

The Government will look at further targeted measures for personal support workers, who do an essential service helping the most vulnerable in our communities. Canada must better value their work and their contributions to our society.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected Canadians with disabilities, and highlighted long-standing challenges. The Government will bring forward a Disability Inclusion Plan, which will have:

A new Canadian Disability Benefit modelled after the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors;

A robust employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities;

And a better process to determine eligibility for Government disability programs and benefits.

Over the last six months, it has become clearer than ever why Canadians need a resilient health care system.

The Government will ensure that everyone – including in rural and remote areas – has access to a family doctor or primary care team. COVID-19 has also shown that our system needs to be more flexible and able to reach people at home. The Government will continue to expand capacity to deliver virtual health care.

The Government will also continue to address the opioid epidemic tearing through communities, which is an ongoing and worsening public health crisis. Additionally, the Government will further increase access to mental health resources. All Canadians should have the care they need, when they need it. We will all be stronger for it.

The same goes for access to the medicine that keeps people healthy. Many Canadians who had drug plans through work lost this coverage when they were laid off because of the pandemic. So this is exactly the right moment to ramp up efforts to address that.

The Government remains committed to a national, universal pharmacare program and will accelerate steps to achieve this system including:

Through 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.

In addition to good health infrastructure, Canadians also need strong, safe communities to call home.

The Government has banned assault-style firearms. The Government will also continue implementing firearms policy commitments, including:

Giving municipalities the ability to further restrict or ban handguns;

And strengthening measures to control the flow of illegal guns into Canada.

Women's safety must be the foundation on which all progress is built. The Government will accelerate investments in shelters and transition housing, and continue to advance with a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.

To keep building strong communities, over the next two years the Government will also 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.

In the last six months, many more people have worked from home, done classes from the kitchen table, shopped online, and accessed government services remotely. So it has become more important than ever that all Canadians have access to the internet.

The Government will accelerate the connectivity timelines and ambitions of the Universal Broadband Fund to ensure that all Canadians, no matter where they live, have access to high-speed internet.

And to further link our communities together, the Government will work with partners to support regional routes for airlines. It is essential that Canadians have access to reliable and affordable regional air services. This is an issue of equity, of jobs, and of economic development. The Government will work to support this.

Strong communities are places where everyone has a safe, affordable home.

No one should be without a place to stay during a pandemic, or for that matter, a Canadian winter.

This week, the Government invested more than \$1 billion for people experiencing homelessness, including for this fall.

In 2017, the Government announced that it would reduce chronic homelessness by 50 percent.

The Government has already helped more than a million people get a safe and affordable place to call home. Given the progress that has been made, and our commitment to do more, the Government is now focused on entirely eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada.

At the same time, the Government will also make substantial investments in housing for Canadians.

The Government will add to the historic National Housing Strategy announced in 2017 by increasing investments to rapid housing in the short term, and partnering with not-for-profits and co-ops in the mid- to long-term. For the middle class, the Government will also move forward

with enhancements to the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, including in Canada's largest cities, so families can afford to buy their first home.

Housing is something everyone deserves, and it's also a key driver of the economy. Construction projects create jobs, and having a home is critical so people can contribute to their communities. Just like everyone deserves a home, everyone deserves to be able to put nutritious food on the table.

The pandemic has made that harder for Canadians. The Government will continue to work with partners – including directly with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation partners – to address food insecurity in Canada. The Government will also strengthen local food supply chains here in Canada.

The Canadian and migrant workers who produce, harvest, and process our food – from people picking fruit to packing seafood – have done an outstanding job getting good food on people's plates. They deserve the Government's full support and protection.

The Government will also ensure that those in Canada's supply managed sectors receive full and fair compensation for recent trade agreements. Farmers keep our families fed, and we will continue to help them succeed and grow.

A stronger workforce

This pandemic has revealed gaps in health, housing, and food supply. And it has also laid bare inequalities Canadians face in the workforce.

We have an opportunity to not just support Canadians, but grow their potential. Working with the provinces and territories, the Government will make the largest investment in Canadian history in training for workers. This will include by:

Supporting Canadians as they build new skills in growing sectors;

Helping workers receive education and accreditation;

And strengthening workers' futures, by connecting them to employers and good jobs, in order to grow and strengthen the middle class.

From researchers developing vaccines, to entrepreneurs building online stores, this pandemic has reminded us of the power of the knowledge economy, and how vital it is for our future.

Canadians are leading, and they should have government services that keep up.

The Government will make generational investments in updating outdated IT systems to modernize the way that Government serves Canadians, from the elderly to the young, from

people looking for work to those living with a disability. The Government will also work to introduce free, automatic tax filing for simple returns to ensure citizens receive the benefits they need.

Government must remain agile, and ready for what lies ahead.

Taking action on extreme risks from climate change

Climate action will be a cornerstone of our plan to support and create a million jobs across the country.

This is where the world is going. Global consumers and investors are demanding and rewarding climate action.

Canadians have the determination and ingenuity to rise to this challenge and global market opportunity.

We can create good jobs today and a globally competitive economy not just next year, but in 2030, 2040, and beyond.

Canadians also know climate change threatens our health, way of life, and planet. They want climate action now, and that is what the Government will continue to deliver.

The Government will immediately bring forward a plan to exceed Canada's 2030 climate goal.

The Government will also legislate Canada's goal of net-zero emissions by 2050.

As part of its plan, the Government will:

Create thousands of jobs retrofitting homes and buildings, cutting energy costs for Canadian families and businesses;

Invest in reducing the impact of climate-related disasters, like floods and wildfires, to make communities safer and more resilient;

Help deliver more transit and active transit options;

And make zero-emissions vehicles more affordable while investing in more charging stations across the country.

A good example of adapting to a carbon-neutral future is building zero-emissions vehicles and batteries. Canada has the resources – from nickel to copper – needed for these clean technologies. This – combined with Canadian expertise – is Canada's competitive edge.

The Government will launch a new fund to attract investments in making zero-emissions products and cut the corporate tax rate in half for these companies to create jobs and make

Canada a world leader in clean technology. The Government will ensure Canada is the most competitive jurisdiction in the world for clean technology companies.

Additionally, the Government will:

Transform how we power our economy and communities by moving forward with the Clean Power Fund, including with projects like the Atlantic Loop that will connect surplus clean power to regions transitioning away from coal;

And support investments in renewable energy and next-generation clean energy and technology solutions.

Canada cannot reach net zero without the know-how of the energy sector, and the innovative ideas of all Canadians, including people in places like British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Government will:

Support manufacturing, natural resource, and energy sectors as they work to transform to meet a net zero future, creating good-paying and long-lasting jobs;

And recognize farmers, foresters, and ranchers as key partners in the fight against climate change, supporting their efforts to reduce emissions and build resilience.

The Government will continue its policy of putting a price on pollution, while putting that money back in the pockets of Canadians. It cannot be free to pollute.

This pandemic has reminded Canadians of the importance of nature. The Government will work with municipalities as part of a new commitment to expand urban parks, so that everyone has access to green space. This will be done while protecting a quarter of Canada's land and a quarter of Canada's oceans in five years, and using nature-based solutions to fight climate change, including by planting two billion trees.

The Government will ban harmful single-use plastics next year and ensure more plastic is recycled. And the Government will also modernize the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. When the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration was closed by a previous government, Canada lost an important tool to manage its waters. The Government will create a new Canada Water Agency to keep our water safe, clean, and well-managed. The Government will also identify opportunities to build more resilient water and irrigation infrastructure.

At the same time, the Government will look at continuing to grow Canada's ocean economy to create opportunities for fishers and coastal communities, while advancing reconciliation and conservation objectives. Investing in the Blue Economy will help Canada prosper.

The Canada we're fighting for

This is a fight for Canadians today and Canada tomorrow. So we must never forget the values that make us who we are. The fourth and final foundation of the Government's approach is defending Canadian values and ensuring they are lived experiences for everyone.

Canada is a place where we take care of each other. This has helped Canada weather the pandemic better than many other countries.

Canada must continue to stand up for the values that define this country, whether that's welcoming newcomers, celebrating with pride the contributions of LGBTQ2 communities, or embracing two official languages. There is work still to be done, including on the road of reconciliation, and in addressing systemic racism.

Reconciliation

Throughout the pandemic, the Government has made it a priority to support Indigenous communities, which has helped contain the spread of COVID-19 and kept people safe. That is something the Government will continue to do.

The Government will walk the shared path of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and remain focused on implementing the commitments made in 2019. However, the pandemic has shown that we need to keep moving forward even faster on a number of fronts including by:

Expediting work to co-develop distinctions-based Indigenous health legislation with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation, and a distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategy;

Accelerating work on the National Action Plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls for Justice, as well as implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action;

And continuing to close the infrastructure gap in Indigenous communities, working on a distinctions-basis with First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation to accelerate the government's 10-year commitment.

The Government will also:

Make additional resiliency investments to meet the clean drinking water commitment in First Nations communities;

And support additional capacity-building for First Nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation.

The Government will move forward to introduce legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples before the end of this year.

Addressing systemic racism

For too many Canadians, systemic racism is a lived reality. We know that racism did not take a pause during the pandemic. On the contrary, COVID-19 has hit racialized Canadians especially hard.

Many people – especially Indigenous people, and Black and racialized Canadians – have raised their voices and stood up to demand change.

They are telling us we must do more. The Government agrees.

The Government pledged to address systemic racism, and committed to do so in a way informed by the lived experiences of racialized communities and Indigenous Peoples.

The Government has invested in economic empowerment through the Black Entrepreneurship Program, while working to close the gaps in services for Indigenous communities. Important steps were taken with the release of Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy for 2019-2022, the creation of an anti-racism secretariat, and the appointment of the first-ever Minister focused specifically on diversity and inclusion. This is all good, but much more needs to be done for permanent, transformative change to take shape.

The Government will redouble its efforts by:

Taking action on online hate;

Going further on economic empowerment for specific communities, and increasing diversity on procurement;

Building a whole-of-federal-government approach around better collection of disaggregated data;

Implementing an action plan to increase representation in hiring and appointments, and leadership development within the Public Service;

And taking new steps to support the artistic and economic contributions of Black Canadian culture and heritage.

Progress must also be made throughout the policing and justice systems. All Canadians must have the confidence that the justice system is there to protect them, not to harm them. Black Canadians and Indigenous Peoples are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. That has to change.

The Government will take steps to ensure that the strong hand of criminal justice is used where it is needed to keep people safe, but not where it would be discriminatory or counterproductive.

The Government will:

Introduce legislation and make investments that take action to address the systemic inequities in all phases of the criminal justice system, from diversion to sentencing, from rehabilitation to records;

Move forward on enhanced civilian oversight of our law enforcement agencies, including the RCMP;

Modernize training for police and law enforcement, including addressing standards around the use of force;

Move forward on RCMP reforms, with a shift toward community-led policing;

And accelerate work to co-develop a legislative framework for First Nations policing as an essential service.

Protecting two official languages

Our two official languages are woven into the fabric of our country.

The defence of the rights of Francophones outside Quebec, and the defence of the rights of the Anglophone minority within Quebec, is a priority for the Government.

The Government of Canada must also recognize that the situation of French is unique. There are almost 8 million Francophones in Canada within a region of over 360 million inhabitants who are almost exclusively Anglophone. The Government therefore has the responsibility to protect and promote French not only outside of Quebec, but also within Quebec.

In this vein, 51 years after the passage of the Official Languages Act, the Government is committed to strengthening this legislation among other things, taking into consideration the unique reality of French.

A welcoming Canada

Immigration remains a driver of Canada's economic growth.

With other countries rejecting global talent that could help their economy, Canada has an opportunity as we recover to become the world's top destination for talent, capital, and jobs. When people choose Canada, help build Canada, and make sacrifices in support of Canada, we should make it easier for them to formally become Canadian.

Earlier this year, the Government announced measures to grant permanent residency to people who, although not Canadian citizens, had cared for the most vulnerable in long-term care homes and other medical facilities.

The Government will continue to bring in newcomers and support family reunification. We know that there is an economic and human advantage to having families together.

As part of both the short-term economic recovery and a long-term plan for growth, the Government will leverage the advantage we have on immigration to keep Canada competitive on the world stage.

Canada in the World

We must take action on all of these priorities at home. But we must also address the world in which we live.

COVID-19 has accelerated the existing trends toward a more fragmented global order. It remains in Canada's interest to create and maintain bilateral and multilateral relationships to advance peace and economic prosperity.

The Government will invest more in international development while supporting developing countries on their economic recoveries and resilience. Canada will also support work to ensure that people around the world have access to a vaccine. We cannot eliminate this pandemic in Canada unless we end it everywhere.

The Government will also continue to stand up for human rights and the rule of law. It is unacceptable that any citizen be arbitrarily detained. Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor must be brought home. This is something for which all Canadians stand united.

The Government will continue to fight for free trade, including by leading the Ottawa Group to reform the World Trade Organization.

Our likeminded allies and partners are investing to make sure their societies emerge stronger.

This Government's plan does that as well.

Conclusion

Taken together, this is an ambitious plan for an unprecedented reality. The course of events will determine what needs to be done when.

But throughout, protecting and supporting Canadians will stay the top priority.

And the core values that have driven the Government since day one remain the same.

In 2015, Canadians asked their government to deliver real change on everything from middle class jobs to climate change. In 2019, the people chose a Parliament that would keep moving forward on these shared goals. And in 2020, Canadians expect nothing less.

It is no small task to build a stronger, more resilient country.

It will take hard work. It will require a commitment to finding common ground.

Parliamentarians, Canadians have placed a trust in you to guide this country forward. They have placed their faith in you to work together to meet whatever challenges we face.

Remember that we are here today because of the generations of Canadians who came before us.

We are here because of the women and men – our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents – who had the courage to reach for a better future.

Today, it is our turn. Our moment to build a stronger and more resilient Canada for everyone.

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

Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Commons, may you be equal to the profound trust bestowed on you by Canadians, and may Divine Providence guide you in all your duties.