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CTV News with Lloyd Robertson

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Governor General Adrienne Clarkson delivers Speech from the Throne.

Throne speech closely mirrors election promises

CTV.ca News Staff

The first minority government in 25 years delivered a throne speech that renewed its promises on health care, child care, cities, and the environment, but offered few surprises.

The first and largest section of the speech, which was largely a repeat of promises made in the June election, dealt with Canada's economy, and a vow that the government "will not spend itself into deficit."

"The government will make difficult decisions among competing priorities and systematically review all

expenditures, reallocating from old to new, from past to future," Gov. Gen. Adrienne Clarkson read, in her second throne speech in eight months.

The speech trumpeted the recent health-care deal between the federal government and provincial and territorial leaders.

As expected, it also touted a deal with the cities that will see a portion of the gas tax go toward helping municipalities invest in infrastructure such as public transit, roads, clean water and sewers.

It also reiterated Prime Minister Paul Martin's promise of 5,000 more troops for the military, and 3,000 more reservists, "so that they may be better prepared and equipped to meet these challenges."

Conservative Leader Stephen Harper said he thought the speech "was quite a weak document."

"I was kind of underwhelmed, I have to admit."

NDP Leader Jack Layton said he is waiting to see what action will back up the speech, and criticized the Liberals for not making any specific commitments on issues such as the Kyoto Protocol.

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On Wednesday, the opposition and the Prime Minister will reply to the throne speech.

Harper has previously warned his party might oppose the throne speech. Reports suggest the Conservatives will suggest an amendment that calls for tax cuts for low-income earners.

"There was some conversation that we would bring the government down. After reviewing this throne speech, I think this government needs to be built up a little bit. I don't think it's actually got off the ground yet," Harper said.

New promises

One of the new initiatives included in the speech from the throne is a promise to put in place a foundation for a national child care system.

"It's historic, actually. It's the first time the words 'national child care' have appeared together in a throne speech," Kira Heinbeck of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care told CTV's Mike Duffy.

The throne speech also promises to increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement for Canada's least-well off seniors.

"It's a bump up," said Finance Minister Ralph Goodale. He said it will work out to be about a seven-per-cent increase.

As for when seniors can expect to see the increase, Goodale said: "I'm hopeful that we can at least begin the process in my budget, which will be next February or March."

In a new environmental initiative, the government promised beginning in 2006 to implement a new Green Procurement Policy to "govern its purchases." It also said it would support environmental technology with proceeds from the sale of Petro-Canada shares.

Canada's relationship with the United States also played a part in the speech. There was no mention of joining the U.S. missile defence plan, but there was talk of strengthening relations to boost security.

"My first obligation is to ensure the safety and security of Canadians," Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan told CTV's Mike Duffy.

"But we know no country is an island. We know that after Sept. 11th. Therefore we need to work with our allies. And the United States is our closest friend and neighbour."

Throne speech promises:


- Reform the equalization system under which richer provinces support poorer provinces
- Push for an open, rules-based trading system
- Strengthen measures to fight racism, hate speech and hate crimes
- Table legislation to protect against trafficking and child pornography
- Improve tax-based support for those who care for elderly or infirm loved ones
- Enhance sports activities at community and competitive levels
- Consider democratic reform, including electoral reform


Because the speech is considered a vote of confidence in the government, if the Liberals can't secure support, their government could collapse.


Clarkson opened and closed the 40-minute speech with a commitment to ensure the minority government works.


"Working together, we can unite the voices of all Canadians in common purpose," she said.

The throne speech will be debated for about two weeks before a vote is taken. The Liberals need the full support of at least one opposition party for it to pass.


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
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
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