

Budget Speech 2013: Andrew Weaver MLA

Thank you Mister Speaker,

Members,

I am honoured to rise today to give my response to the Budget that was reintroduced last week. Before I begin my response, I want to make a few quick acknowledgements.

First and foremost, I would like to recognize the dedicated work of my predecessor in Oak Bay – Gordon Head, Ida Chong, for her representation of our community. She made it her job to attend every community event that she could, and worked hard for her constituents through her various ministerial positions. For example, this Friday a project she spent many years working on will come to fruition. Ground will be broken for the new Oak Bay High School.

I will strive to meet the standard she set for all those who wish to represent our riding.

Secondly, I want to thank my family for their tireless support of me over the past few months. Campaigns are easy on no one, least of all our families. Thank you. I would also like to acknowledge the countless volunteers who assisted during the campaign. It was truly a team effort that led to our success.

I would also like to acknowledge the staff of the legislature. Transitioning into this historical building and into the role as an MLA could have been far more challenging, were it not for the supportive people who have assisted me and my staff in preparing ourselves for the duties that face MLAs.

Finally, to my constituents, thank you for putting your faith in me to be your voice in the legislature. As I noted during the campaign, I will support good policy, while not hiding from my role to constructively criticize policy that doesn't serve you, my constituents. I look forward to working with Members on both sides of this aisle, both those familiar to me, and those who I have not yet had the chance to meet.

And now ... to the budget.

On February 19, 2008, I sat on the other side of this chamber, as a guest of Premier Gordon Campbell, while the Honourable Carole Taylor presented her budget. That day, I watched as the Liberal government laid out a vision for BC that redefined the legacy we would leave to our children. That budget stood as a turning point for British Columbia, not simply because it put us on a path to lead the continent in climate policy, but because it signalled an end to either-or thinking that pits the environment against the economy.

To quote the former finance minister: "It is a budget that confronts and completely overturns the outdated notion that you have to choose either a healthy environment or a strong economy. That's simply not the case. That either-or thinking belongs to the past."

February 19, 2008 was an historic moment in BC. Together, and under Liberal leadership, we recognized the importance of addressing one of the most pressing issues of our time: Climate Change. And we did so in the context of continued strong economic policy.

Here we are now in 2013 and, once again, we have the opportunity to forge a future for British Columbia that we can all be proud of. Yet, doing so demands of us the continued recognition that a strong economy and a healthy environment *must* go hand-in-hand.

The government has proposed a budget for 2013 that is designed to define a legacy — not only their legacy, but that of all British Columbians. And in doing so, it offers a vision for our province's future. It is a vision that meets the needs of the present, while offering our children the opportunity to be unburdened by the choices of past generations, so that they too may be free to make their own choices, to build their own future. But the question I pose to this room today: Does this budget achieve that vision?

The 2013 Budget undoubtedly contains elements that British Columbians will applaud: A focus on taking steps to ensure fiscal management in these uncertain economic times; investments in skills training; commitments to work with First Nations on economic development; plans to enhance end of life care and ultimately reduce the provincial debt for future generations. But despite these strengths, the budget rests on a foundation that will undercut the very vision the Liberals have proposed.

I believe that ultimately we all want the same thing: A future that ensures that the needs of both present and future generations are met. A future that provides our children with opportunities for innovation and prosperity. But we must be cautious of striding forward, heedless of the obstacles before us. We must not lose sight of our vision when the going gets tough. And we must not rest our future on one desired outcome.

In the scientific profession, we are always cautious of allowing our assumptions to exceed the evidence. So too must we be wary of this in government. Starting from the assumption that the prosperity of future generations lies solely in the development and export of Liquefied Natural Gas will ensure that the only evidence we use, is evidence that supports this conclusion.

To base our economy on LNG is to risk subjecting BC's economy to the boom and bust roller coaster of global fossil fuel pricing, with all its twists, turns and drops. Meanwhile, investors are increasingly highlighting the possibility of a global carbon bubble and the real economic risks that surround it. To attempt to lay all our eggs in this one basket, on the hope that we will be the one exception — the one jurisdiction that will defy history and economics— is to base our future on very unstable ground.

Yet even if we defy the odds, coast through the boom and bust cycles and breeze through the carbon bubble, we cannot achieve our provincial carbon targets while we double down on LNG. We will have no choice but to abandon our continent-leading, climate commitments. That's not politics, it's science. And the numbers just don't add up. The carbon emissions associated with LNG development are simply too high to allow us to meet those targets.

So we once again find ourselves facing the same choice that the Liberal government so aptly framed in 2008:

We can offer future generations a path that pits the economy against the environment for narrow-sighted economic gain, or we can be the generation that leaves a legacy that rejects

this outdated thinking — one that invests in a strong and enduring economy that is founded on a culture of unwavering environmental responsibility.

Now is no time to turn back on our convictions, no matter how challenging they may be to uphold.

To quote Minister Taylor: “How many times have we heard people talk about the importance of the environment, only to change their tune as soon as the economy faced challenges? Our children, our young people, are asking better of us. They're asking us to face directly the challenges of the future — not when it's convenient, but right now.”

I believe we need to continue to meet those challenges — to strive for a grander goal that sees us forge ahead not only in developing a strong, sustainable, diversified economy, but to do so in a way that ensures we continue to lead North America in our commitment to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Together, we can achieve this goal. British Columbia is endowed with clean energy potential like few other places; not just hydro, but wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal potential, to name a few. According to a 2011 report written by KPMG, BC's clean tech sector, although young, shows tremendous opportunities for growth. It is a sector that provides local, secure and high-paying jobs. In the United States, Federal reports show that Green jobs have grown at a rate 4 times faster than the national average. There is incredible, untapped potential in the clean tech sector and the fact is, we have the industry, the expertise and the environmental resources to lead the world in this area. What we need, is clear government leadership and policy to help develop this clean tech sector.

The world is moving in this direction, and we need to as well if we are to keep ahead. Just last week President Obama gave a speech outlining his vision for a transition to a low-carbon economy. His speech made it clear that the current and future effects of climate change cannot be ignored — there is too much at stake. To quote from his speech:

“We don't have time for a meeting of the Flat Earth Society. Sticking your head in the sand might make you feel safer, but it's not going to protect you from the coming storm.”

The tragic flooding that devastated Calgary and the Uttarakhand region of India, the wildfires engulfing Arizona, the heat wave in Las Vegas, the storm surge that wreaked havoc on New York last fall pale in comparison to the extreme weather events we have in store as a consequence of unchecked global warming.

What we are about to see are clear and significant shifts in economic policy, subsidies, innovation and engineering from the United States. The question is, what will BC do?

President Obama has recognized the economic opportunity that dealing with climate change offers the US and the world. To quote from his speech once more: “...countries like China and Germany are going all in in the race for clean energy... I want America to win that race, but we can't win it if we're not in it.” This focus on a shift from an economy currently dominated by fossil fuels, to one built on renewable energy and the clean tech sector should be a wakeup call for BC. The United States is set to become a leader in this area, placing our province as a

distant second cousin to our southern neighbour. But it doesn't have to be this way. BC was, could, and should continue be at the forefront of promoting innovation and economic prosperity through our clean tech and clean energy sectors.

But as we move forward, let us be clear about what clean energy is. Clean energy is energy that does not emit carbon into the atmosphere. Hydro, solar, wind — these are clean energies. Natural gas is not a clean energy. It is *cleaner* energy — certainly cleaner than coal and oil — but that still does not make it clean.

Permitting the use of Natural Gas as a clean energy source to provide the energy that fuels an LNG export industry is not what the Clean Energy Act was created to do. Those of us who were involved in BC's Climate Action Team, appointed by former Premier Gordon Campbell, know this. Similarly, developing the Site C Dam, but then using it to power the Liquification facilities for foreign natural gas export is contrary to the very notion of why we increasingly need to develop our clean energy resources.

There is no doubt that natural gas will have a role to play in helping us move towards a low carbon economy, and one that is able to provide for its citizens. Government could work with industry to transition our truck fleets from diesel to natural gas, providing potential savings to operators, and helping to reduce the GHG emissions emanating from our transportations sector. Similarly, government could investigate the use of natural gas in its BC Ferries fleet, helping reduce its operating costs and lower its GHG emissions all at once. These examples highlight how natural gas should be used — as a transitional complement to other sources of truly renewable energy. Natural gas should not be the main act, and its development should not be an end in itself.

Yet ultimately, this vision is about more than the economy and the environment. Building a stable, low-carbon economy is about creating the opportunities that allow us to provide the essential public services that we all agree are necessary, without the uncertainty and risk of boom-and-bust funding cycles. In my riding of Oak Bay-Gordon Head alone, we face significant challenges in enhancing seniors care, in addressing adolescent mental health issues, in finding cost-effective means of dealing with our sewage. We must work with schools, colleges and universities to map a path for continued world class education, and one that addresses the significant challenges youth face in breaking into the job market. These are just a few of many examples of challenges whose solutions rest on the foundation of a strong, stable, low-carbon economy. Together, let's make this possible.

I would like to finish with a final quote from the Honourable Carole Taylor, as she finished her budget speech in 2008. I ask that as we continue the budget debates, and move into the next 4 years, we consider Minister Taylor's words carefully and ask ourselves what legacy will we leave?

“We can be the generation that had it all and let it slip away, or we can seize this opportunity which is before us to be the generation of British Columbians who made the right decisions, who chose to take action and, by doing so, showed their respect for the earth, for the atmosphere, for those who came before us and for those who will follow in the decades to come.”