

Judging by the throne speech, Canada is en route to a train wreck

In policy terms, almost every sentence of the address was a disaster

by Conrad Black



The throne speech in Ottawa on Dec. 5 was a thoroughly depressing occasion. The attempt at solemnity failed. The Senate chamber was much too crowded; the audience looked like humanoid sardines; too many of the people in colourful ceremonial costume were implausible, bulged in their clothing, and emphasized the anachronistic aspect of the whole occasion. The Governor General was gracious and amicable and delivered the address unexceptionably, but dressed in black, she looked like the female clergy at a Hutterite funeral. Only one of the men in the three-cornered hats was passably bilingual. If there had been one unscheduled act of accidental slapstick, it

would have been a Monty Python episode. Commentators compared it to corresponding occasions in London and Washington. In neither place is the chamber overcrowded; the language is not absurdly antiquarian; and the chief of state who delivers the address (the queen or president of the U.S.) does 98 per cent of the verbalizing and enters and departs in state, not as a cog in an inelegant procession of mysteriously over-costumed functionaries.

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These were mere sounds and appearances, however. The text of the speech was very disquieting. It was a dreary succession of spending promises punctuated by recurrences to the call to war on climate change, and in international affairs, a prostration of this country before the United Nations. In policy terms, almost every sentence of the address was a disaster. It continues to be assumed that the climate is changing wildly outside historic cyclical fluctuations, a proposition for which there is scant evidence, that the cause is anthropogenic emissions (i.e. by humans) and that the result will be the swift deterioration and destruction of life itself if radical measures are not taken. We don't know anything beyond the fact that there seems to be some change afoot. The scientific community is very divided and confesses to be seriously under-endowed with methods for measuring climate change. Ocean temperatures are variously and randomly calculated at different depths and by different types of equipment; the results vary widely and are ambiguous. The past 30 years of dire predictions from the alarmists, especially the scientifically illiterate ones like Al Gore and the Prince of Wales, have proved to be outright piffle.



Governor General Julie Payette delivers the speech from the throne in the Senate chamber in Ottawa on Dec. 5, 2019.

Yet this is the Holy Grail of this government, and the

Governor General even inserted a phrase allegedly of her own composition about the Earth being a spaceship, inoffensive and appropriate given her previous occupation, but none of this belongs in the government's outline of federal policy in the next session of parliament. The target is zero net carbon emissions by 2050. This is nonsense and is an explicit declaration of war on the oil and gas industries, our greatest potential exporter, at a time when the United States has resumed its status as an exporter of energy for the first time in 70 years and added 150,000 jobs in that sector last year. The desperate embrace of a carbon tax while the federal government tries to strangle the country's greatest natural resource industry, vital to four provinces, is completely irresponsible and will soon be seen to be so. I have no objection to planting two billion trees, as the speech pledged; I like trees, but I'm not sure it's necessary.

The economic section of the speech was just the premature arrival of a fiscally incontinent official Santa Claus. All but the wealthiest will have tax cuts; more public housing, greater before and after school childcare, enhanced cell and wireless services, more ample student loans and grants: these will all be made more available/affordable by increased federal government subsidization. Pensions, the federal minimum wage, compensation for "supply managed" industries and infrastructure investment will also all rise. The only glimmers of hope of something both feasible and useful, almost imperceptible, unspecific and fleeting, were promises of reduction in domestic trade barriers, and reduced red tape for small businesses. Also in the cornucopia are national pharmacare, which I take to mean virtually free prescribed drugs, a miraculous (i.e. unexplained) expansion of access to medical care, especially mental-health care, treatment for opioid abuse, and the customary pledge of tightened restrictions on firearms and unspecific strengthening of what is officially called the "gender-based violence strategy," presumably intensified deterrence of men physically

intimidating or harming women.

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There is also the obligatory promise to improve the living conditions of native people, and in international affairs, we will renew the commitment to NATO (without approaching our promised level of defence spending) and to United Nations peacekeeping (though it rarely accomplishes anything useful), and the obscenely grovelling campaign for two years for the UN Security Council is now a national competitive crusade and we are all part of Team Canada. Such is our abundance of human and pecuniary resources we will spread it around the world, with "like-minded countries." With this address as our self-identifying clarion, there will not be many such countries.

Unless it is proposed to produce annual accounts in which revenues are less than half the spending commitment and interest payments rapidly require grossly inflationary increases in the money supply, little of this will happen. We are failed by our elected representatives but the authority of Grade 3 arithmetic is unshaken. What the prime minister should have given the Governor General to read was promise of a massive overhaul of the tax system to raise revenue with increased transactional taxes on nonessential spending and broad reduction of personal and corporate income taxes, especially for people and businesses of modest means; and environment policy that made war on untreated sewage and industrial emissions and other pollutants, and vigilance on climate matters to try to help produce a real consensus of expert analysis, and departure from the present treadmill of witless agitation. Sanity is not denial. All of the proposed pipelines should be built at once with proper environmental safeguards and a reasonable level of compensation where the eminent domain of the national interest impinges on genuine (and not opportunistically confected) native rights. The high

court of Parliament should replace the tyranny of idiosyncratic Charter judges.



The Speaker of the House of Commons holds a copy of the throne speech in the Senate, as parliament prepares to resume for the first time after the election, in Ottawa on Dec. 5, 2019. Blair Gable/Reuters

Responsible self-government by natives must be encouraged; public money must be spent prudently, and each individual in that community must be enabled to make a personal choice of the extent desired for integration into Canadian society and for retention of native life. Native communities must be sanitary and sufficiently large and sophisticated to resist the ravages of isolation and economic stagnation that afflict many of them now. We should lead comprehensive reform of the United Nations and increase our defence spending by 50 per cent – it's the most effective form of public-sector spending stimulus. The increased forces should be deployed, if necessary, to deliver cheaper gasoline and home heating fuel by pipeline to Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois leader, Yves-François Blanchet, lost no time saying he would sustain the government as his delegation is already enjoying the \$175,000 salary given to MPs, and the throne speech said nothing about pipelines. On that subject, like Bill 21 (the religious symbol ban for Quebec government employees), the Quebec nationalists are looking for a field of battle for the next referendum, now that Quebec has the better side of the economic argument, thanks to this federal government's mismanagement. Alberta and Saskatchewan already have a secessionist argument if they want to make it. The Conservatives should choose their new leader carefully, because that person will have to try to clean up the train wreck announced in the throne speech.

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