

U1L3A3 | Comparing progress in Different Countries

overview

Students will compare the progress and how it compares in countries that have different viewpoints on how to obtain progress (neoliberalism versus progressive economics).

learning goal

- To develop a personal opinion of what progress is and how it should be measured.

success criteria

- Students will define their opinion of progress and how it is measured.

Inquiry Question

- Which policy (Neoliberalism or Progressive Economics) can be seen in Norway, Venezuela and Canada?

Step 1: Article Analysis

Read the article provided:

'Poverty versus Progress: Comparing the US and Venezuela'

www.globalresearch.ca/poverty-versus-progress-comparing-the-us-and-venezuela/5321055

1. Which mindset do these two regions employ?
2. What are the social effects?

Read the article provided:

'Census Figures Show Reduction in Poverty in Venezuela over Last Decade'

venezuelanalysis.com/news/7644

1. How has Venezuela's approach to measuring progress affected their society?
2. Which model do Canada and Norway follow?
3. What are the implications of this on their society?

Step 2: A closer look at Canada

What about Canada?

Read Stephen Harper's address to the UN.

www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/09/25/read_stephen_harpers_address_to_the_un_general_assembly.html

and The 2015 Speech From the Throne <http://speech.gc.ca/en/content/making-real-change-happen>

1. How has the philosophy of the Canadian government changed?
2. How may these differing beliefs affect progress in Canada?
3. How well do you feel Canada is achieving the goals that are outlined in PM Harpers' address?

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Step 3: Millenium Development Goals (MDG)

Millennium Development Goals (UN)

Define MDGs with the class. Have students examine the data:

1. Divide the class into eight equal groups and assign each group one of the millennium goals to examine.
2. Use the website below and examine the progress of Canada, Norway and Venezuela for your assigned goal mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx
3. Make three conclusions about the data you observed.
4. What questions did this date raise in your mind?
5. Share your findings with the class.
6. Respond to the findings of the other groups by comparing their findings to those of your group and answering the following reflective questions:
“Describe the life of a child growing up in Canada in comparison to one of the other two countries. Consider the factors that might influence your behaviour and experiences. Include your feelings, beliefs and assumptions as well as any factual information you have been given.”

Step 4: Final Food for Thought

Have the class watch a TED Talk by Bjorn Lomborg
blog.ted.com/2013/10/02/have-we-made-any-progress-since-2005-bjorn-lomborg-updates-his-classic-ted-talk-in-a-new-talk-at-ted-hq

Questions for discussion:

- Has the world made any progress?
- What would you spend the money on and why?
- Why are these choices hard to make?

Census Figures Show Reduction in Poverty in Venezuela over Last Decade

Jan 25, 2013, by Paul Dobson - Correo del Orinoco International



Eliás Eljuri, president of Venezuela's National Institute of Statistics (Informe21)

Representatives from Venezuela's National Institute of Statistics (INE) officially revealed some of the most important conclusions from the 14th National Census of Population and Housing to the Venezuelan public this week.

The most potent conclusion drawn from the census, which was conducted during 2011, was that extreme poverty levels have significantly been reduced in the ten previous years.

In 2001, 11.36% of the population were measured to be suffering from extreme poverty, while President of the INE, Elias Eljuri, announced that the 2011 census showed that currently only 6.97% are in a similar situation, a reduction of nearly half in the past 10 years, and one which he described as "very significant".

Other conclusions presented to the population include a rise in life expectancy, from 74.5 years to 79.5 years and a 16% rise in the general population numbers, from 24.8 million inhabitants to 28.9 million in 2011.

Furthermore, it was announced that of those 28.9 million, 88.8% currently live in urban areas, while 11.2% live in rural areas, and that the percentage of the population classed as indigenous rose from 2.3% in 2001 to 2.8% in 2011, with 700,000 citizens currently being classed as indigenous.

Such figures reinforce the success of the social policies of the revolutionary government of Hugo Chavez, particularly in the health sector, as well as the infrastructure of basic necessities, but also the education and alimentary sectors.

The National Coordinator of the Census, Luis Geronimo, drew attention to the fact that despite the rise in the general population, the rate of growth is slowly decreasing, meaning that the population will continue growing in the future, just at a slower pace. Furthermore, he stated that there had been a reduction in births and a rise in deaths since 2001, showing that the population is gradually aging.

"For 2050 we expect to be about 40 million people, with a growth rate lower than 0.5%" he explained. "These are demographic changes which all of the countries in the world are demonstrating where there is a process of demographic transition".

The average family size has also reduced, he explained. "Now we are at less than 3 children (per female), and for 2050 we expect to arrive at less than 2 children per female. Also, we expect that less women have children, unless there are important migratory processes which change this tendency".

Such figures show the changes in equality achieved in the last 10 years, allowing women to have better access than ever before to secure jobs, and high level positions, and not be only expected to fulfill the child bearer role in society.

Eljuri explained the methods used by the INE to measure the levels of poverty in the country, in order to preempt accusations from certain political sectors that the statistics have been modified for political ends.

Eljuri explained that the INE used the five basic necessities promoted by the Economic Commission for Latin America (Cepal) to evaluate the levels of poverty.

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The five necessities which represent poverty are: (1) households with children between 7 and 12 years old which don't attend any school; (2) households which have more than 3 people living in a room; (3) households who live in a house with inadequate construction; (4) households without access to drinkable water or sewerage; and (5) households with more than 3 members where the head of household has less than 3 grades of basic education.

Eljuri explained that this system is called the Unsatisfied Basic Needs system (NBI), and is used to evaluate those households in poverty, extreme poverty, and outside of poverty.

"A household in poverty is that where at least 1 of these 5 factors are applicable; a household in extreme poverty is that where 2 or more are applicable; and a household outside of poverty is that which has all 5 of the necessities met".

Using this system, he showed figures that demonstrate that households outside of poverty have risen from 67% in 2001 to 75.43% in 2011, and that "the total of those in poverty have reduced from 21.64% to 17.6%". "In all indications examined", he concluded, "there was an important reduction of poverty".

He also highlighted that critical overcrowding has reduced from 15.12% to 10.10%, while inadequate house construction has reduced from 9.38% to 8.69%. Similarly, households without basic water and sewerage services have reduced from 14.79% to 8.88%.

He also highlighted that the figures from the census are fully transparent and available to the public on the INE website. Furthermore, impressive as they are, the figures, he explained, do not take into account certain changes seen during 2012 which, according to Eljuri, have had dramatic effects on the demographics of the nation, predominantly the housing Mission Vivienda which was launched towards the end of 2011.

The 346,000 houses and apartments built during the end of 2011 and 2012 were not taken into account in the census which was conducted during the first 8 months of 2011, and he expects that this mission, amongst other factors, will mean that poverty levels are, today, in fact even lower than the figures shown in 2011.

There are estimations, he explained, that combined poverty will have closed 2012 at around about 6.5%, down significantly from the 2011 figures, due to such changes in the housing of the population bought about by government policies.

He finally observed that Venezuela has seen the most significant decrease in poverty in the last 10 years in the continent, and that it continues having the lowest rate of inequality in the continent.

Despite complete clarity by the INE of their methods and results, certain self-proclaimed 'experts' have already appeared in the opposition means of communication claiming that the results have been engineered for political gains, or suggesting that the methods used by the INE did not meet satisfactory levels of thoroughness.

Such 'experts' provided no proof or evidence for such claims, and merely claimed that there were certain vague "problems" with the census, while at the same time failing to recognize the gains and successes the population has experienced under Chavez's presidency.

Such statistics are to be used to further enable the strategic planning of the points of attention of governmental policies which address housing, infrastructure, education, access to basic necessities, and especially for the future of the public housing program, which plans to build 380,000 more high quality houses and apartments in 2013 alone.

Poverty versus Progress: Comparing the US and Venezuela

By Eric Draitser

Global Research, January 29, 2013

Url of this article:

www.globalresearch.ca/poverty-versus-progress-comparing-the-us-and-venezuela/5321055

If we are to take the traditional definition of the term, then “Third World” refers to those (non-white) countries that struggle to attain high levels of economic development and which, for the most part, are reduced to the periphery of the global economy.

However, since the onset of the economic crisis beginning in 2007-2008, many of the economic problems of those traditionally poor countries have become ever more apparent in the so-called developed world. Socio-economic maladies such as extreme poverty, hunger, and unemployment have skyrocketed in advanced capitalist countries like the United States, while politicians and the media continue to trumpet the mirage of an economic recovery.

Naturally, one must ask for whom this is a recovery...for the poor or for Wall St? Moreover, it has forced the world to examine what progress looks like. One way of doing so is to analyze what the statistics tell us about the United States versus Venezuela. In so doing, one begins to get a much clearer picture, free from the distortions of media and politicians alike, of just how much progress has been made in the Bolivarian Revolution while the situation of the poor and working classes in the US continues to deteriorate.



What Is Poverty?

Before one can reach any definitive conclusions about poverty in the US and Venezuela, it is essential to first establish the stark difference in the way in which poverty is measured in the two countries. With respect to the US, poverty is measured purely by household income, with a certain threshold known as the “poverty line” determined by the Census Bureau. This measurement, based on a purely arbitrary delineation between poverty and “non-poverty”, is the one by which many make determinations about the state of the poor in the US. As should be self-evident, this system of analyzing poverty ignores the obvious fact that

there is little tangible difference between the lives of those slightly over and slightly under the poverty line in that both live in a constant state of privation. Moreover, as increasing inflation, decreasing wages and other factors continue to impact the purchasing power and actual lives of the poor, the poverty line becomes even more problematic.

In contrast, the Venezuelan government has a distinctly different set of measurements to determine true poverty including: access to education, access to clean drinking water, access to adequate housing, and other factors.[i]

Essentially then, in Venezuela, poverty is not a measure of income, but of quality of life. By measuring poverty in this way, the Venezuelan government provides a far more comprehensive picture of the socio-economic situation in the country. It is important to note also that, unlike in the United States, poverty statistics in Venezuela are

one of the primary driving forces behind the formation of government policy. While in the US, poverty has become a dirty word (as evidenced by the subject's total absence from last year's presidential debates), Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution have made it the centerpiece of public policy in all aspects.

What the Numbers Show

When one examines the statistical data compiled by the Census Bureau in the United States, many very troubling facts emerge. First, it's critical to note that, in 2012, the poverty line for a typical family of four was at a combined gross income of \$23,050.[ii] Note that this indicator is derived from gross income as opposed to net income, so it doesn't even reflect the gravity of the situation faced by these families.

Anyone who has even a rudimentary understanding of the current costs of living in the United States can immediately surmise that the "poverty line" is a cruel joke. This level of income means abject poverty, it means a lack of basic necessities for human life. So, in essence then, we're not talking about "the poor", but those on the verge of death with problems such as malnutrition, serious illness from treatable conditions, and countless other hindrances to basic existence. In addition, it should be noted that median family income (for all families, not just those in poverty) continues to decline dramatically, with a decrease of 8.1% since 2007.[iii] Therefore, it becomes apparent that, not only is poverty widespread, it is growing.

California, long touted as the most economically vibrant state in the US, is now known as more than just the home of Silicon Valley and beautiful coastline, it is also home to the highest levels of poverty in the United States. According to the Supplemental Poverty Measure of the US Census Bureau, California boasts a 23.5% poverty rate[iv] which, if included with those who do not technically fit the poverty measure but who still live very much on the economic margins, shows that poverty is fast becoming an epidemic in California.

As University of Wisconsin Madison economist Timothy Smeeding explained, "As a whole, the safety net is holding many people up, while California is struggling more because it's relatively harder there to qualify for food stamps and other benefits." [v] Essentially then we see that, in the nation's most populous and, arguably most economically important state, the situation of the poor is a dire one as more and more people become dependent on government programs just for survival. This is, of course, against the backdrop of austerity or so-called "entitlement reform" championed by both Republicans and Democrats, which would cut these same programs which are becoming ever more critical for millions of Americans.

Income cannot and should not be seen as the only indicator of poverty and economic status. Indeed, there are many other factors including access to proper nutrition, particularly important for children growing up in situations of poverty. In fact, the most recent data from the USDA suggests that at least 18 million households in the US were food insecure as of 2011.[vi] This is merely the tip of the iceberg when one considers that there are millions of households who are not categorized as "food insecure" but who cannot afford high quality food and the still more families who are only food secure because of government programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) formerly known as food stamps. Lack of access to highly nutritious foods is characteristic of poor, urban neighborhoods where primarily people of color struggle to feed their children with something other than fast food or low quality food purchased at the corner store.

What becomes apparent in even a cursory examination of this information is that food security and poverty are not merely indicators of economic hardship, they are class designations. The United States is home to an ever-expanding underclass, one that is encompassing more and more formerly working class people and white people, but which still afflicts communities of color most acutely. In every major city and more and more formerly affluent white suburbs, poverty has become an ever-present reality, one that remains hidden as Americans engage in the collective self-deception of "economic recovery."

The Venezuelan Model

In contrast to the United States, Venezuela continues to make tremendous strides in eradicating poverty from a nation that, for decades, had been one of the poorest and most exploited in the Americas. Despite vast oil wealth and abundant resources, Venezuela was characterized by extreme poverty, particularly among the indigenous and peasant populations. This was the product of the colonial and post-colonial system wherein a small, light-skinned elite dominated the country and kept the rest of the people in abject poverty. This situation began to change with the ascendance of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution. Immediately Chavez, already a hero to poor Venezuelans, set about implementing his socialist model that would make the fight against poverty the centerpiece of his public policy. Indeed, this is precisely what has happened in the fourteen years since he took office.

As mentioned previously, Venezuela uses a comprehensive set of criteria to measure poverty including access to education, clean drinking water, adequate housing, households with more than three people living in a room, and households where the head of the household had less than three years of education. Using this rubric, known as the Unsatisfied Basic Needs system (NBI), the statistics are intriguing. In the last ten years, the number of Venezuelans living in extreme poverty (those who experience two of the five indicators of poverty) has decreased from 11.36% to 6.97%, a reduction of almost one half. At the same time, life expectancy and total population have increased significantly, showing the impact of better and more comprehensive health care services. One particularly important piece of data has to do with indigenous people, the group most marginalized historically. In the last ten years, their numbers have grown significantly as well, now making up almost 3% of the population.[vii] This shows that, not only have the quality of health programs and related services increased, but access to them has grown as well, particularly for those traditionally disenfranchised segments of the population.

It should be noted that one of the centerpieces of the anti-poverty programs of the Chavez Bolivarian government has been the exponential increase in construction of public housing and affordable units. President Chavez announced the Great Housing Mission (GMVV)[viii] in 2011 to combat the extreme poverty that so many Venezuelan families faced as they lived in inadequate or unsafe homes. As of September 2012, more than 250,000 homes had been constructed and given to poor Venezuelan families.[ix] This number is surely set to increase in the coming year as the program continues to expand and housing becomes ever more accessible and plentiful.

In the midst of a worldwide economic crisis, the Chavez government continues to expand spending on anti-poverty programs such as housing construction and health care while much of the so-called developed world engages in the mass hysteria of austerity. The Bolivarian Revolution set before itself the task of reducing and ultimately eradicating poverty in a country where poverty was a historical tradition and a seemingly immutable reality. The post-colonial era of Venezuelan history is one fraught with domination and oppression by the United States and subjugation to multinational corporations while the poor and working classes lived in wretched conditions. Chavez's commitment to reversing that legacy is what has, more than anything else, enshrined his legacy in the hearts and minds of Venezuelans.

Conversely, the advanced capitalist economies of North America and Europe are desperately trying to maintain their hegemony and economic survival by means of austerity programs which shift the burden of the depression from the wealthy financiers and speculators who created it to the poor and working class who must pay for it. Draconian cuts to necessary social services upon which millions of Americans depend for their very survival serve to illustrate this point further. Unlike in Venezuela, the Western imperial powers seek to destroy the social safety net and drive their populations into further destitution and desperation. This is, to put it another way, the crisis of advanced, post-industrial capitalism – an economic system which must expand the divide between rich and poor, create extremes of wealth and poverty and generally perpetuate itself on the misery and poverty of the lower classes. Seen in this way, Republicans and Democrats,

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President Obama and House Speaker Boehner alike are culpable for the massive suffering and despair of the poor in the US who can look to Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution as a model for a truly progressive vision of the future.

Notes

[i] venezuelanalysis.com/news/7644

[ii] coverageforall.org/pdf/FHCE_FedPovertyLevel.pdf

[iii] www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/income_wealth/cb12-172.html

[iv] www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p60-244.pdf

[v] www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/14/california-poverty_n_2132920.html

[vi] www.ers.usda.gov/media/884529/err-141-summary.pdf

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] venezuela-us.org/2011/03/14/president-chavez-announces-creation-of-%E2%80%9Cmission-housing-venezuela%E2%80%9D/

[ix] venezuela-us.org/2012/09/07/nearly-250000-homes-built-by-venezuelas-great-housing-mission/

Eljuri explained that the INE used the five basic necessities promoted by the Economic Commission for Latin America (Cepal) to evaluate the levels of poverty.

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Read Stephen Harper's address to the UN General Assembly

Prime Minister Harper addressed the UNGA on September 25 for the first time since 2010.

By: Star Staff Published on Thursday September 25, 2014



Prime Minister Stephen Harper addresses the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York Sept. 25.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/poverty-versus-progress-comparing-the-us-and-venezuela/5321055>

For more than seventy years, Canada has supported the United Nations and its institutions, in the pursuit of world peace.

On many occasions Canadians have put their lives on the line to deter active conflict between peoples.

It is a duty we accept and it is a record of which we are proud.

Today, there are many embattled parts of the world where the suffering of local populations and the threats to global security deserve our urgent attention, and I could easily use my entire time here on any one of them.

There are however, other areas of service to humanity. It is to some of these that I wish to speak tonight.

For there is more to peace than the absence of war.

Where human misery abounds, where grinding poverty is the rule where justice is systematically denied, there is no real peace only the seeds of future conflict.

Then we understand how the worst of human nature, perverse ideologies, religious extremism, the lust for power and plunder can rob people in so many places of property, hope and life itself.

That is why Canada has always been ready and willing to join with other civilized peoples and to challenge affronts to international order, affronts to human dignity itself, such as are today present in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and many parts of Africa.

But while these extreme situations on which Canadas positions are well known are being confronted, other problems, such as the problems of underdevelopment remain.

Canadians, therefore, seek a world where freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law are respected.

We hold these things to be intrinsically right and good.

And we also believe that they are the necessary foundation for a better world for more people, necessary for prosperity, and with prosperity comes hope, and with hope, the greater inclination of free peoples everywhere to find peaceful solutions to the things that divide them.

Indeed, we believe freedom, prosperity and peace form a virtuous circle.

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For this reason, the growth of trade between nations, and the delivery of effective development assistance to ordinary people simple, practical aid these are the things that have become the signatures of our Governments outreach in the world.

Trade means jobs, growth and opportunities.

It has made great nations out of small ones.

The story of my own country, Canada, is a case in point.

Historically, trade has built our country, just as today, it is reshaping our world.

Trade means ordinary people can support their families and even dare to dream of something more.

The trade agreements we have concluded tear down the barriers of tariff and excise, and enlarge markets and opportunities for buyers and sellers alike.

Canada has now established such links with countries that today possess more than a quarter of the world's people and nearly half the world's business.

And our free-trade network will grow larger yet.

This is not an exclusive club for wealthy nations.

Yet, no matter how freely we trade, millions of people will, for some time to come, need a helping hand. Easily the most important example and the one closest to my heart, is the worldwide struggle upon which so many of you have been engaged — the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Initiative.

Saving the lives of the world's most vulnerable mothers, infants and children must remain a top global priority. That is, the world must honour the commitments made in this very room to mothers and children in the year 2000.

And there has been remarkable progress.

I think especially of the 2010 meeting of world leaders at Muskoka that raised about seven and a half billion dollars, two billion of it from private donors.

Based on that, the United Nations launched what the Secretary-General called the Every Woman, Every Child Initiative, with the goal of saving 16 million lives by 2016.

An important aspect of this work has been to monitor both the receipt of monies pledged, and how they were used.

The assurance of full accountability has allowed recipients to plan with certainty and donors to give with confidence.

With His Excellency President Kikwete of Tanzania, it was my honour to co-chair the World Health Organizations Information and Accountability Commission linked to this initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a clear vision and that vision is achievable.

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We know how to help many of these vulnerable people.

We have seen what can be done.

We want, therefore, simply to rally the passion and the will to make it happen.

We are preventing, and can prevent more, deaths, deaths of thousands of children every day from easily preventable causes.

We can stop thousands of mothers dying in childbirth who, with relatively little intervention, would survive.

We also know who we need to be working with: new partnerships, partnerships that bring together governments, agencies of the UN the World Health Organisation, the World Food Program and UNICEF with the private sector.

Partnerships that are producing real results and taking us to new heights of excellence.

Here I'm thinking of the MNCH Network in Canada, a group that represents a broad base of Canadian civil society, and are key implementing partners on the ground.

As many of you know, this past May in Toronto, Canada hosted the worlds leading actors on this subject.

We heard the success stories, for example, the Micronutrient Initiative through which 180 million children received Vitamin A pills costing pennies, but that drop child mortality by 25 per cent.

We heard about the Vaccine Alliance, GAVI, and of how, during the three-year period between 2010 and 2013, immunizations saved the lives of two million children.

We have partnerships to deliver better nutrition and better measurement, because vital statistics are critical.

You can't manage what you can't measure. And in this mission, we measure progress in precious lives saved. So every child needs a birth certificate.

So our consensus was clear.

We have seen success, and we have momentum.

Saving the lives of children and mothers is a fight we can win.

To get it done, two things are needed now: the political focus and renewed financial commitment.

I therefore urge this assembly, in the strongest terms, to ensure that in the evolving, post-2015 development agenda, maternal, newborn and child health remain a clear and top priority.

That is the political focus we need.

Then there is the financial commitment.

I know we all have many competing priorities.

But, to have come so far that to stop now would be a tragedy.

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I must tell you, I was very encouraged this morning at the secretary general's Every Woman Every Child event, when President Kim of the World Bank and other leaders announced new financing for the Banks Global Financing Facility For Every Woman, Every Child.

This facility will help developing countries access the financing required to improve their health systems.

I am pleased to announce that Canada will financially support the World Bank's Global Financing Facility For Every Woman, Every Child.

In closing let me say this.

There are many individual countries and specific causes that will rightly occupy your deliberations here this week.

Let's also not forget to also look beyond those, at the long-term opportunities and efforts that can truly transform our world.

We have it in our power to create a better kind of world for our children's children than we have today.

And we should.

For, it was never the intention of the founders of the United Nations, Canada being one of them, that ours would be a world where terrorists could get the resources necessary to sow death and destruction, but where workers and families could not get jobs and opportunities, or where mothers and children could not obtain those necessities required to live and to thrive.

The world that Canada strives for is the world that the founders of the United Nations wanted from the beginning, as boldly articulated in their declaration of 1942: a world where life, liberty, independence and religious freedom are defended, where human rights and justice are preserved, and where all join in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to subjugate the world.

In such a world, there can be prosperity for the impoverished, justice for the weak, and, for the desperate, that most precious of all things, hope.

It is easy to look at the many problems of the world today and become despondent.

Yet, for all our failings there has been, for most of humanity, tremendous progress in my lifetime.

Therefore, I am enough of an optimist to think that, because we can create a more prosperous, fairer and hopeful world, not only should we, but, indeed, I believe we will.

Merci beaucoup.

Thank you.

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Making Real Change Happen

Speech from the Throne to Open the First Session of the Forty-second Parliament of Canada

speech.gc.ca/en/content/making-real-change-happen

Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As the representative of Her Majesty The Queen, I am pleased to be here to deliver the Speech from the Throne.

A warm welcome to those of you who are returning to your duties as parliamentarians, including those who are returning after an absence. Know that your experience is valued.

Welcome also to the 197 members who are newly elected. Your enthusiasm and fresh ideas will serve your country well.

I call on all parliamentarians to work together, with a renewed spirit of innovation, openness and collaboration.

As governor general, I have seen first-hand what a great country Canada is—from coast to coast to coast.

And I also know this: We can be even better.

How?

By being smart, and caring—on a scale as never before.

The times we live in demand nothing less.

Canada succeeds in large part because here, diverse perspectives and different opinions are celebrated, not silenced.

Parliament shall be no exception.

In this Parliament, all members will be honoured, respected and heard, wherever they sit. For here, in these chambers, the voices of all Canadians matter.

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Let us not forget, however, that Canadians have been clear and unambiguous in their desire for real change. Canadians want their government to do different things, and to do things differently.

They want to be able to trust their government.

And they want leadership that is focused on the things that matter most to them.

Things like growing the economy; creating jobs; strengthening the middle class, and helping those working hard to join it.

Through careful consideration and respectful conduct, the Government can meet these challenges, and all others brought before it.

By working together in the service of all Canadians, the Government can make real change happen.

It will do so in the following ways.

GROWTH FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

First and foremost, the Government believes that all Canadians should have a real and fair chance to succeed. Central to that success is a strong and growing middle class.

The Government will, as an immediate priority, deliver a tax cut for the middle class.

This is the fair thing to do, and the smart thing to do for Canada's economy.

The Government has also committed to provide more direct help to those who need it by giving less to those who do not. The new Canada Child Benefit will do just that.

And recognizing that public investment is needed to create and support economic growth, job creation and economic prosperity, the Government will make significant new investments in public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure.

To give Canadians a more secure retirement, the Government will work with the provinces and territories to enhance the Canada Pension Plan.

The Employment Insurance system will be strengthened to make sure that it best serves both the Canadian economy and all Canadians who need it.

To create more opportunities for young Canadians, especially those from low- and

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middle-income families, the Government will work with the provinces and territories to make post-secondary education more affordable.

And to support the health and well-being of all Canadians, the Government will begin work with the provinces and territories to develop a new Health Accord.

The Government will undertake these and other initiatives while pursuing a fiscal plan that is responsible, transparent and suited to challenging economic times.

OPEN AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT

Second, the Government is committed to open and transparent government.

The trust Canadians have in public institutions—including Parliament—has, at times, been compromised. By working with greater openness and transparency, Parliament can restore it.

To make sure that every vote counts, the Government will undertake consultations on electoral reform, and will take action to ensure that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.

To restore public trust and bring an end to partisanship, the Government will follow through on its commitment to reform the Senate by creating a new, non-partisan, merit-based process to advise the Prime Minister on Senate appointments.

And to give Canadians a stronger voice in the House of Commons, the Government will promote more open debate and free votes, and reform and strengthen committees.

Also notable are the things the Government will not do: it will not use government ads for partisan purposes; it will not interfere with the work of parliamentary officers; and it will not resort to devices like prorogation and omnibus bills to avoid scrutiny.

A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT AND A STRONG ECONOMY

Third, the Government will prove to Canadians and to the world that a clean environment and a strong economy go hand in hand. We cannot have one without the other.

Protecting the environment and growing the economy are not incompatible goals; in fact, our future success demands that we do both.

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Last week, first ministers met ahead of the international climate change talks—a first step in an important and ongoing process.

Working together, the Government will continue to provide leadership as Canada works toward putting a price on carbon and reducing carbon pollution.

To encourage economic growth, the Government will make strategic investments in clean technology, provide more support for companies seeking to export those technologies, and lead by example in their use.

And as part of efforts to restore public trust, the Government will introduce new environmental assessment processes.

Public input will be sought and considered. Environmental impacts will be understood and minimized. Decisions will be informed by scientific evidence. And Indigenous peoples will be more fully engaged in reviewing and monitoring major resource development projects.

DIVERSITY IS CANADA'S STRENGTH

Fourth, the Government's agenda reflects that Canada's strength is its diversity.

Canadians elected a government to bring us together, not to set us against one another. Canada is strong because of our differences, not in spite of them.

As a country, we are strengthened in many ways: by our shared experiences, by the diversity that inspires both Canada and the world, and by the way that we treat each other.

Because it is both the right thing to do and a certain path to economic growth, the Government will undertake to renew, nation-to-nation, the relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples, one based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

Among other measures, the Government will work co-operatively to implement recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, will launch an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and will work with First Nations so that every First Nations child receives a quality education.

The Government will make it easier for immigrants to build successful lives in Canada, reunite their families, and contribute to the economic success of all Canadians.

In response to a pressing international need, and underscored by Canadians' desire to help, the Government

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will welcome 25,000 new Canadians from Syria, to arrive in Canada by the end of February 2016.

In gratitude for the service of Canada's veterans, the Government will do more to support them and their families.

The Government will support CBC/Radio-Canada, encourage and promote the use of Canada's official languages, and invest in Canada's cultural and creative industries.

SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Fifth, the Government is committed to providing greater security and opportunity for Canadians.

Canadians are open, accepting, and generous people. We know that helping those in need strengthens our communities and makes them safer, more prosperous places to live.

The Government will strengthen its relationship with allies, especially with our closest friend and partner, the United States.

Internationally, the Government will focus its development assistance on helping the world's poorest and most vulnerable.

To contribute to greater peace throughout the world, the Government will renew Canada's commitment to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and will continue to work with its allies in the fight against terrorism.

To keep Canadians safe and be ready to respond when needed, the Government will launch an open and transparent process to review existing defence capabilities, and will invest in building a leaner, more agile, better-equipped military.

And to expand economic opportunities for all Canadians, the Government will negotiate beneficial trade agreements, and pursue other opportunities with emerging markets.

Recognizing that Canada is, fundamentally, a safe and peaceful country, the Government will continue to work to keep all Canadians safe, while at the same time protecting our cherished rights and freedoms.

To that end, the Government will introduce legislation that will provide greater support for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault; that will get handguns and assault weapons off our streets; and that will legalize, regulate and restrict access to marijuana.

CONCLUSION

The agenda outlined today is an ambitious one, but it is not one forged in isolation.

Rather, it is the result of conversations with Canadians, who told the Government—plainly and honestly—what they need to be successful.

Canadians are confident people. We know who we are, and we know what kind of country we want to live in.

We know the greatness that Canada is capable of, and we know that our success is not only about doing well for ourselves, but also about leaving an even better, more peaceful and prosperous world for our children.

As you consider the important work that lies ahead, remember that Canadians have placed their trust in you. It is now your sacred responsibility to help build that better world.

By focusing on growing our middle class, on delivering open and transparent government, on ensuring a clean environment and a strong economy, on building a stronger Canada, and on providing greater security and opportunity, the Government will make real change happen.

It will prove that better is not only possible—it is the inevitable result when Canadians work together.

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

Honourable Members of the Senate and Members of the House of Commons, may Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations and make you faithful custodians of the trust bestowed upon you.

Date modified: