Title
Summary of Speech from the Throne: Protecting Canada’s Future (November 2008)

Topic
The Governor General delivered the Speech from the Throne outlining the broad goals that the federal government would like to achieve in a political climate which is veiled in economic uncertainty.

Background
The Speech from the Throne officially opens every new session of Parliament. It is written by the governing party and is read by the Governor General in the Senate. The Speech marking the opening of the 40th session of Parliament was delivered on November 19, 2008 by Governor General Michaëlle Jean. This followed the Conservative Party of Canada, led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, being re-elected with a minority government by winning 143 of the 308 seats in the House of Commons in the general election held on October 14, 2008.

Status
The Speech outlined that tough economic times were to come and the Government of Canada would have to make some difficult choices. The Governor General stated that Canada was in a unique position to deal with the situation because of the exemplary fiscal management on the part of the Canadian Government and its banking system, which is among the best regulated in the world. A subsequent economic update that was delivered by the Minister of Finance on November 27 was heavily criticized by the three opposition parties for its failure to take bold economic action in the midst of a turbulent global economic situation. The Liberal Party and the New Democrats, with the support of the Bloc Quebecois, formed a coalition and vowed to defeat the Harper government on a confidence vote at the next opportunity. This political crisis led to the Governor General agreeing with the Prime Minister’s request to prorogue Parliament on December 5.

Key Considerations
The Speech outlined eleven broad areas that the Harper administration would like to address.

• “Reforming Global Finance”
  o Canada will work to maintain free and open markets so as to play a leading role to help resolve the current economic crisis.
  o Government will work with the provinces to implement a common securities regulator.

• “Ensuring Sound Budgeting”
  o Funding will be available for departments’ essential programs, no excess funding.
  o Grants, contributions and capital expenditures will be assessed responsibly.
  o Government will focus on responsible fiscal management.

• “Securing Jobs for Families and Communities”
  o Government will take measures to ensure public infrastructure projects are implemented quickly, ensure Aboriginals share economic opportunities, encourage business investment, and assist industries, such as fisheries, mining, automotive and forestry.

• “Expanding Investment and Trade”
  o Government will proceed with legislation to modernize our competition and investment laws, as well, modernize Canadian copyright laws.
  o By 2010, government and the provinces will work together to remove barriers to internal trade, investment and labour mobility.
• “Making Government More Effective”
  o Review all program spending and make it easier for private and not-for-profit sectors to do business with government.
  o Government will help to build partnerships with third parties in order to lower costs for services.
• “Securing Our Energy Future”
  o Support for the development of cleaner energy resources.
  o Work to reduce the expense of extending a pipeline to Canada’s north.
• “Tackling Climate Change and Preserving Canada’s Environment”
  o Committed to reducing Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020.
  o Goal: By 2020, 90% of Canada’s electricity will come from non-emitting sources.
• “Helping All Canadians Participate”
  o Improve the Universal Child Care Benefit and work to increase access to maternity and parental benefits under Employment Insurance (EI).
  o Extend the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.
• “Keeping Canada Safe”
  o Strengthen the power to recall products.
  o Strengthen legal provisions in areas that include youth crime, organized crime and gang violence.
  o Produce a national security statement to explain how government plans to balance the new threats that have emerged and the threats to national security.
• “Contributing to Global Security”
  o Prepare to end military mission in Afghanistan in 2011.
  o Rebuild and arm the Canadian Forces.
  o Establish a non-partisan promotion agency to help aid in peaceful transition to democracy in repressive countries.
• “Building Stronger Institutions”
  o Senate reform (e.g., elected Senators for fixed terms no longer than eight years and which must follow the same ethics rules as Members of Parliament).
  o Renewal of the public service.

Recommendations
The early proroguing of Parliament means that a new session of the 40th Parliament will be opened on January 26, 2009 whereupon the Governor General will deliver a new Speech from the Throne. It is recommended that a comparison of the 2008 Speech be made with the 2009 Speech to analyze if the government has deviated from its previous goals. However the situation must be monitored. There is a risk that the opposition parties will not support the Harper government’s budget, which is scheduled to be delivered on January 27, 2009, and it is therefore possible that the Speech will not be implemented. Since the leaders of the Bloc Quebecois and the NDP have said that they have lost confidence in the government, the survival of the Conservative administration and its ability to implement the Speech rests with the Liberal party and its new leader, Michael Ignatieff.

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