

Analysis

Beginning of the end: a chastened Clark acknowledges her premiership is likely coming to a close

If 16 years of Liberal rule are concluding, how Clark leaves will go a long way to determining her legacy

By Justin McElroy, [CBC News](#) Posted: May 30, 2017 8:02 PM PT Last Updated: May 31, 2017 6:26 AM PT

Changes of government in Canada are often quick, dramatic affairs: Years of rule crashing down in a few hours, a contrite loser accepting democracy at one rally, an exuberant victor heralding the dawn of a new political era at another.

This is not that.

But 22 days after the votes were cast in British Columbia's seemingly never-ending provincial election, a turning point was reached.

Holding the balance of power, three Green Party MLAs have [agreed to support the legislature's 41 NDP MLAs](#) and help take down the minority Liberal government at the first possible chance. Premier Christy Clark subsequently announced she would [test the confidence](#) of the House, but would "likely" lose an immediate confidence vote.

- [Christy Clark to stay on as B.C. premier — for now](#)
- [NDP-Green alliance to focus on stopping Kinder Morgan](#)

From Clark, there were no promises of trying to find opposition MLAs to support her.

No references to playing procedural games with a Speaker that could paralyze the legislature.

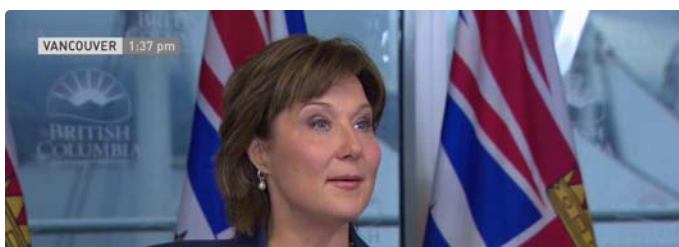
No threat of requesting that the Lieutenant-Governor dissolve the legislature should she lose.

"If there is going to be a transfer of power in this province, and it certainly seems like there will be, it shouldn't be done behind closed doors. It should happen in public," said Clark to reporters Tuesday afternoon, displaying only some of the sunny, serene optimism that has characterized her six years as premier, the word "HUMBLE" [scrawled beneath her prepared notes](#).

Suddenly, the flow chart seems streamlined.

The B.C. Legislature will convene sometime in June, a throne speech will be voted on, the Liberal government will fall, Lt.-Gov. Judith Guichon will request the presence of NDP Leader John Horgan — and after a 16-year absence, the New Democrats will once again form government in the province.

Unless, of course, it doesn't happen that way.



'Through the motions' or something more?

Those closest to the premier emphasize that she is not gearing up for a final fight, that her decision to stay on and face a vote in the legislature is based on her desire to see any transfer of power happen through a democratic process.

"She has every right to go through the motions she has outlined," said former Liberal strategist Alise Mills.

"There was no majority of vote to one party. I think it's important to go through the motions, I think it's important to fight for what she believes in."

- [Eyes turn to B.C.'s lieutenant governor in minority government](#)
- [Christy Clark gets 1st chance to govern — but how long can it last?](#)

But as political scientists pointed out, Clark isn't bound by convention, like a lieutenant-governor. She could have resigned on the spot — and not doing so opens up a range of possibilities as to how her party will try to play out the situation for long-term political advantage.


"She's going to table a very generous budget and throne speech, and then just make the NDP and Greens vote her down," said David Moscrop, a political scientist with Simon Fraser University.

"Then they've [the Liberals] got opposition fodder and election fodder. I don't think that's best for politics in British Columbia, but it's a shrewd political move," Moscrop said. "And to her credit, she's a fighter, she's often a winner, and she's a good politician. This is probably the right political move, but probably not the best thing for the province."

Final act

And despite weeks of speculation, more remains: Will Clark ask the Lieutenant-Governor to reconvene the legislature in early or late June? Will she or other Liberal surrogates talk anymore about the fact they received the most seats and the most votes of any party?

Will her throne speech be rudimentary or full of new proposals? Will any Liberal MLA put their name forward to serve as Speaker?



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If Clark truly has no real desire to stay on as premier, "it would be a civics lesson to us all, a demonstration of what happens," said UBC political scientist Max Cameron.

But if she does, could a final legislative showdown still be in the offing?

While the book on Clark's reign as B.C.'s 35th premier may now mostly be written, as with any tale, the final chapter greatly influences how we remember it.

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