



June 29, 2017

## B.C. NDP to form government, ending 16 years of Liberal rule

By JUSTINE HUNTER And MIKE HAGER  
Globe and Mail Update

*Premier Christy Clark asked Lieutenant-Governor Judith Guichon to trigger a new election, but that request was rejected*

Almost two months after a provincial election, British Columbians will have a new government, following a tense evening in which the province's Lieutenant-Governor spent hours in deliberation with the leaders of the governing Liberals and Opposition New Democrats.

Finally, NDP Leader John Horgan emerged from Government House to announce that he had been invited to serve as B.C.'s next premier after offering assurances to Lieutenant-Governor Judith Guichon that he could provide continuity of government.

"We discussed the configuration of the legislature," he told reporters waiting outside, while supporters cheered. "I think this is an extraordinary opportunity for a new legislature to work co-operatively."

**Explainer: B.C.'s Liberal minority government has fallen: What happens next<sup>1</sup>**

**Gary Mason: NDP waited 16 years for this. Now comes the hard part<sup>2</sup>**

Premier Christy Clark ended 16 years of Liberal rule when she tendered her resignation on Thursday night after she lost a vote of confidence in the legislature. The vote was tied to her government's Throne Speech.

The NDP have not won an election in B.C. since 1996, but will seek to govern with a minority of seats, buttressed by the three Green MLAs who have pledged support on key legislative measures, including budgets.

The New Democrats and Greens voted together to defeat the Liberals. A hush fell over the packed House as the roll call was read. Afterward, Ms. Clark emerged from the chamber to applause from staff, MLAs and other supporters who lined the halls of the legislature.

Inside the legislature, Mr. Horgan embraced former NDP leader Carole James in a bear hug. In the floor seats behind his caucus were retired NDP cabinet ministers Moe Sihota and Sue Hammell.

"I'm excited – now, seven weeks after the election, we can get going on a government that works for the people," he said in an interview.

Mr. Horgan said he will take the Liberals up on their promise, contained in their recent Throne Speech, to work with all parties to craft legislation.

"There's an enormous amount of work to do," he said outside Government House. "It's been 16 years since there's been a transition of government, there's been 16 years of challenges that have been created for many, many people. These challenges won't be fixed overnight."

Mr. Horgan said he would turn his focus to putting together a cabinet and preparing for the transition.

As premier-designate, Mr. Horgan and his team will have access to government briefing documents and deputy ministers. Mr. Horgan is expected to be sworn in with his new cabinet in late July. After that, they would spend some weeks drafting a Throne Speech, a budget, and several pieces of legislation that they have promised to immediately introduce as part of their agreement with the Greens.

Ms. Clark told reporters she had asked the lieutenant governor to trigger a new election.

"She has chosen another path... And I respect that," said Ms. Clark, who remains premier until Mr. Horgan is sworn in.

However Ms. Clark maintained that she believes the new government, with its narrow balance of power in the House, poses a risk to "really bend the rules of democracy."

Ms. Clark also said the new premier will inherit an excellent fiscal situation. "He is inheriting the best balanced books in the country... I hope he finds a way to preserve that."

The legislature is not expected to be recalled until after Labour Day in early September, and the legislation would include campaign finance reform and would launch a referendum on electoral reform.

The moment was weeks in the making; however, the outcome was anything but certain.

Voters in the May 9 election delivered an inconclusive verdict on B.C. politics: The governing Liberals were reduced to 43 seats, the NDP took 41 seats and the Greens won three.

Once the final ballots were counted, the Greens began negotiations with both the Liberals and NDP to determine which they would support, and eventually reached an accord with the NDP.

The Liberals argued that the NDP and Greens together do not have enough seats to provide stable government, as they will have to provide a Speaker of the House. That leaves the legislature in a perpetual deadlock of 43 votes on each side, and Liberals say the non-partisan role of the Speaker will be eroded by having to constantly vote to break ties.

The premier had said she would not ask Ms. Guichon to dissolve the current House and trigger another election. But she told reporters on Wednesday she would – if asked – offer the opinion that the legislature could not function, even with the NDP-Green agreement in place.

However, the Lieutenant-Governor chose to give the NDP a chance.

Mr. Horgan said issues that will require his government's immediate attention include the fentanyl crisis, the softwood lumber dispute, and the public education system.

As well, the New Democrats plan to launch a review of the \$8.8-billion Site C dam, which could lead to the cancellation of the province's most expensive public infrastructure project in history.

In the May election campaign, the New Democrats promised to raise taxes on the wealthy and real estate speculators to pay for promises that include \$10-a-day daycare, building 114,000 housing units over a decade and annual \$400 subsidies for renters, as well as the elimination of tolls on two bridges in the Lower Mainland.

The Liberals had attacked the NDP platform as unaffordable, but they have since introduced a Throne Speech that offered many of those commitments and more, including an ambitious \$1-billion daycare program.

In a fiscal update earlier this week, Finance Minister Mike de Jong said the Liberals' new promises are affordable, as the economy is performing better than expected. That will provide the NDP more flexibility in the budget they will table this fall.

However, the NDP and Green pact could face challenges.

The two parties will find points of discord. The Greens say they will vote for the NDP budgets but they oppose the lifting of tolls, because the policy would run counter to their climate action agenda. The Greens have also signalled that they will oppose the changes to the Labour Code that the NDP have promised to their labour supporters.

The success of any NDP government could hinge on the continual and unconventional support of the Speaker.

The Speaker, who must enjoy a level of respect from all parties to keep order in the House, has traditionally been detached from regular votes. But that position is challenged with a legislature evenly divided, because the Speaker is, by convention, elected from the government benches.

Under this NDP minority, barring a change in the numbers, the Speaker would regularly be voting to break ties, which some observers have warned would turn it into a highly partisan role.

This happened in New Brunswick in 2003, where a Progressive Conservative government survived on a one-vote margin for three years.

A government in perpetual survival mode put great stress on the Speaker and led the public to become deeply cynical of the politicians in power, according to Shawn Graham, who was Liberal leader at the time.

Mr. Graham, who formed government after beating the Progressive Conservatives in 2006, said the actions of the Conservative Speakers damaged democracy at the time, but had little lasting effect to the role of Speaker as later elections have been won by larger margins.

Philippe Lagassé, an associate professor and constitutional scholar at Carleton University, said an NDP Speaker breaking ties is no more partisan than the Liberal Speaker resigning his post after his party loses government.

"If impartiality was the pre-eminent concern, then that Speaker wouldn't resign," he said.

As well, the coming legislative sessions will be trying for all members of the House. The opposition Liberals will have 43 seats, and absent the Speaker, the governing NDP will have 40 votes. They will need the Greens, at the least, to support any legislative changes. There will be no margin for MLAs to be absent for travel or illness, unless they can find a degree of goodwill –which has been markedly absent in recent weeks – to agree on pairing up absences on both sides.

## References

1. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bc-liberal-minority-what-happens-next/article35308750>
2. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/in-a-strange-few-weeks-for-bc-clark-risked-her-political-past-and-future/article35508225>

The Globe and Mail, Inc.



The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.  
You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing [http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx\\_id=35508261](http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx_id=35508261) into any web browser. The Globe and Mail, Inc. and The Globe and Mail logos are registered trademarks of The Globe and Mail, Inc. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.