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**THE GLOBE AND MAIL**

June 8, 2017

## Clark's Liberals sworn in as premier remains in 'mostly-caretaker mode'

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Globe and Mail Update

*Premier assumes defeat 'a very strong likelihood' as she's sworn in, but says Site C and Kinder Morgan require immediate attention*

B.C. Premier Christy Clark was sworn in on Thursday with her caucus in a muted celebration, while her team calculates the next steps that will take them to an almost-inevitable defeat of her government in the House in just a few weeks.

"I'm assuming, based on what has happened, that there is a very strong likelihood the government will be defeated on a confidence motion," Ms. Clark told reporters Thursday. "I think that's a fair assumption to make."

The B.C. government has been in limbo since the election campaign began in April, and Ms. Clark challenged the opposition leaders to work with her to resolve uncertainty about major infrastructure projects including the \$8.8-billion Site C dam and Kinder Morgan's \$7.4-billion Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project.

"We are in mostly-caretaker mode, but for big projects like Site C and Kinder Morgan, where there are agreements with the private sector, those decisions must be made on a timeline. That's not something that, as a premier in a time of uncertainty, I can change without seeking the advice from other leaders, which is what I am trying to do."

Ms. Clark and NDP Leader John Horgan, who hopes to become B.C.'s next premier, exchanged letters this week over the fate of the Site C project. Mr. Horgan wants some aspects of the project – including evictions of people from their homes – put on hold until the fate of the government is determined, but Ms. Clark says any delay beyond this month would cost taxpayers more than \$600-million. Without government intervention, those evictions are slated to proceed at the end of June.

As well, the NDP and the Greens want to stop construction of Kinder Morgan's expansion project, but Ms. Clark said the province must sign off on permits this month – likely before any change in government would be effected.

Although Mr. Horgan has urged her to recall the legislature and face a vote of confidence quickly to end the uncertainty, Ms. Clark told reporters she will not agree to fast-track a resolution to determine whether her government can survive a vote of confidence. She said it is important to follow the conventions and rules that govern the legislature.

"I understand there is a sense of urgency, but also a sense of real uncertainty," Ms. Clark told reporters, "so I'm trying to make sure we provide that stability – that whatever happens, happens in an orderly fashion as contemplated in all our constitutional conventions."

The BC Liberal government holds the largest number of seats following the May 9 election but with 43 MLAs, Ms. Clark's party did not win a majority. The 41 opposition NDP MLAs have made a pact with the three Greens to vote the Liberals down on a confidence motion at the earliest opportunity.

That showdown is expected in the last week of June, after the Liberals introduce a Throne Speech outlining the things they would wish to do, had they secured a majority.

Mr. Horgan, after a separate ceremony where his MLAs were sworn in, told reporters Ms. Clark has let the government drift too long in the wake of the election.

He said he is ready to form a government, with the Greens' support on matters of budget and confidence, adding there is a crisis in mental health and addictions that urgently needs to be addressed. "We want to get going on those issues as quickly as possible."

He said he would like to sit down with Ms. Clark to talk about a government transition and how that should affect decisions around Site C and Kinder Morgan – but he said the government should not be making significant decisions in the interim.

"Traditionally, the government goes into caretaker mode and they are supposed just make sure we are paying the bills and meeting the needs of citizens while we are in transition."

The legislature will be recalled on June 22 for a Speech from the Throne, and if the Liberals will not agree to fast-track anything as Ms. Clark indicated on Thursday, a confidence vote could not be moved until the last week of June.

Before anything else can happen in the House, however, members of the legislature must appoint a speaker. The Liberals earlier suggested they will not put up one of their own members for the position, but government House leader Mike de Jong acknowledged Thursday that would be unusual.

"The general approach to this is, the party wishing to govern – which is generally the party with the most seats in the House – would select from amongst its members someone to sit as speaker," Mr. de Jong noted. As the Premier wants to follow the conventions in the House, it would be seen as contradictory to hold up the business of the legislature by playing brinkmanship with the opposition over the appointment.

"I think, at the end of the day, prior to the Lieutenant-Governor coming on the 22nd to deliver a Throne Speech, there will be a speaker in the chair," Mr. de Jong said.

Whether that speaker will be a Liberal MLA, however, he would not confirm.

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