

B.C. Budget's housing, child care measures good for business: Premier ^[1]

Author: Canadian Press

Source: EnergeticCity.ca

Format: Article

Publication Date: 23 Feb 2018

AVAILABILITY

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British Columbia's premier says his government's focus on housing and child care in this week's budget is good for the province's businesses.

John Horgan told the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade on Friday that the financial plan will help attract workers to the province and retain them.

"If you can't find schools, if you can't find childcare, if you can't find a doctor, you're going to go somewhere else," he said.

Tuesday's budget included \$1 billion for child care over the next three years and a housing plan that expands a tax on foreign buyers, taxes real estate speculation and allocates \$6 billion for affordable housing over the next decade.

Education, healthcare, housing and child care are generally talked about as social issues, but they're really economic issues, Horgan said.

"If we're not putting in place the social foundation for you to succeed then we're failing the economy."

The premier said his government heard during pre-budget consultations that the business community wanted a balanced budget, which the New Democrats delivered. The budget forecasts a \$219 million surplus for the 2018-19 fiscal year.

But Horgan said a balanced budget is about more than just staying out of the red.

"When we talk about balancing budgets we have to do more than just look at the ledger and the bottom line," he said. "We have to make sure that we're balancing the social needs in the community and I believe we've done a fairly effective job of doing that in this budget."

The board of trade gave the first full budget from Horgan's government a C-plus in a news release. It applauded the province's efforts to alleviate the housing crunch and expressed concerns about the impact of a new health care tax for businesses with payrolls higher than \$500,000, which replaces medical services premiums paid by individuals.

Horgan said he knows the business community has concerns about the new levy, but believes it is a "fair and safe way to reduce what was a

regressive tax, a flat tax.”

Asked about his government’s opposition to the expansion of Kinder Morgan Canada’s Trans Mountain pipeline, Horgan said the New Democrats promised during last spring’s election campaign to use every tool available to stop the project.

The issue has stirred up a heated dispute between B.C., Alberta and the federal government in recent weeks.

Horgan announced Thursday the province will ask the courts if it has the right to protect its environment by restricting diluted bitumen shipments. In the meantime, the province will not proceed with proposed regulatory restrictions on the increase of diluted bitumen transportation, which caused Alberta Premier Rachel Notley to lift a ban on B.C. wine.

Horgan said he made the move because he believes in the rule of law.

“I also did so because I want it to be abundantly clear that it’s not about Rachel Notley and John Horgan and Justin Trudeau, it’s about British Columbia’s right to stand up, whether they agree or disagree,” he said.

But that doesn’t mean the government or others have changed their minds about the project, Horgan said.

“We’re going to see some serious challenges in the weeks ahead. We would be deluded if we thought otherwise.”

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