

Canada 'strong and free' and other takeaways from King's throne speech

King Charles III has given a major speech at the opening of parliament in Canada in which he sought to define its place in an uncertain world and its relationship with the US. The address in Ottawa set out the government's priorities on behalf of new Prime Minister Mark Carney, whose Liberals won the country's general election in April. The campaign was dominated by US President Donald Trump's threats to Canada's independence. The King, who is Canada's head of state, said relationships with partners - including the US - were changing, and he stressed the sovereignty of both nations.



Here are five takeaways from Tuesday's address, which was the first time a monarch has delivered the throne speech opening parliament in almost 50 years.

A message to Trump on sovereignty

Carney's invitation to King Charles was in part a message to Trump, who has made repeated remarks undermining its sovereignty. Tensions with Canada's neighbour were a theme throughout, though the US president was never mentioned by name.

The speech opened with an appeal to patriotism as a trade war looms with the US, Canada's largest economic partner. The King spoke of the "pleasure and pride" of being in the country at a time of renewed "national pride, unity, and hope". He expressed his "admiration for Canada's unique identity" and its growth since the last time a sovereign opened parliament - Queen Elizabeth II in 1957. (She gave a second throne speech 20 years later). It has become "a bold, ambitious, innovative country," he said.

"The Crown has for so long been a symbol of unity for Canada," the King added. "It also represents stability and continuity from the past to the present. As it should, it stands proudly as a symbol of Canada today, in all her richness and dynamism."

The speech concluded on a similar note: "As the anthem reminds us: The True North is indeed strong and free!"

The King's decision to open parliament - a role traditionally left to the governor general, his top representative in Canada - has been seen as a symbolic show of support for the Commonwealth nation.

Emphasis on 'opportunity' of uncertain world

Another major theme of the speech was how Canada would face a world with "unprecedented challenges, generating uncertainties across the continents".

Another nod to the US and tensions between the two countries followed: "The system of open global trade that, while not perfect, has helped to deliver prosperity for Canadians for decades, is changing. Canada's relationships with partners are also changing," the King said.

The speech underscored the need for the country to reinforce its established trading relationships, notably with European allies, while moving forward with economic and security relationship talks with the US. During the recent election campaign, Carney repeatedly said the country was at a pivotal moment in its history. The King's speech emphasised that "this moment is also an incredible opportunity".

"An opportunity to think big and to act bigger. An opportunity for Canada to embark on the largest transformation of its economy since the Second World War."

Plan to end barriers to internal trade

The King also focused directly on domestic policy and plans set out by Carney's Liberals to address the country's economic headwinds. There was a commitment to speed up major national infrastructure projects and to double a loan programme that would enable more indigenous ownership of major projects.

A tax cut and new housing investment

Canada faces housing affordability crises as housing prices have skyrocketed across the country in the last decade. Alongside the US-Canada relationship, it was one of the top issues on the campaign trail. Carney's Liberals promised to double the rate of building to 500,000 new homes a year.

The King's speech underlined the government's other plans to address the issue, including investing in prefabricated and modular housing, and cutting municipal development charges in half for housing with multiple units.

Another major issue during the campaign was crime. The speech contained promises to address tougher penalties for car thefts, home invasions, human trafficking and drug smuggling. House Leader Alexandre Boulerice for the left-wing NDP said after the speech that there were "big holes" on issues like climate and women's rights.

Boosting defence spending alongside Europe

Canada has been under mounting pressure from the US and other Nato partners to increase its military spending, as it continues to fall short of the 2% of GDP on military spending target set out for alliance members. Carney has committed to hitting that benchmark by 2030.

Tuesday's speech contained commitments to "rebuilding, rearming, and reinvesting" in its military; reinforcing defence relationships with European allies, including by joining Rearm Europe, a plan to dramatically increase defence spending on the continent; and to strengthen Canada's Arctic.

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