



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 18, 2020

Dear Premier Horgan,

I hope this letter finds you and your family safe and healthy. While COVID-19 has brought new challenges for every person in our province, I know that the weight of responsibility has been especially heavy on you as Premier.

From the very start, your time as Premier has been marked by the unexpected and the unprecedented. For more than three years we heard from critics that this minority government wouldn't last, that a government that relied on dialogue and mutual respect could not be stable. But for more than three years, by working together, we have shown the opposite to be true.

From the first time we sat down and started working on what would become the Confidence and Supply Agreement, we committed to a shared purpose: we wanted to show the people of British Columbia that it was possible for two different political parties to put aside their differences and collaborate on a shared agenda. That is why the CASA is not just signed by the two leaders of our respective parties, but by every member of our caucuses. They too had, and continue to have, a responsibility to this agreement.

The CASA does not contemplate or require complete agreement between our parties, but instead a commitment to work in good faith and to ensure that there will be no surprises. This commitment allowed us to build strong relationships and establish the trust necessary to advance a shared agenda for the people of this province.

COVID-19 was not and could not have been anticipated when we drafted the CASA more than three years ago, but the response from all parties has been guided by the same commitment to collaboration and communication, with all three political parties coming together to serve our province.

Legislative Office

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In the Spring of 2020 that collaboration was on display as each one of us put aside our partisan interests in order to follow the leadership and advice of health officials. Day after day, hundreds of thousands of British Columbians tuned into the news and saw not political posturing and partisanship, but the tireless and compassionate leadership of Dr. Bonnie Henry.

Now is the wrong time to abandon this non-partisan commitment to protecting British Columbians from a highly infectious disease. COVID-19 is spreading across our province with unrelenting and increasing speed. Tearing up a signed contract with your partners, ignoring the law that establishes fixed election dates and plunging this province into an unnecessary election risks undoing so much of the progress we have seen. The more you let partisanship pollute public discourse, the less trust people will have in their leaders. And trust in our leaders will be essential for the difficult road ahead.

This week you formally extended the provincial state of emergency, and yet, the early election speculation you are choosing to feed continues.

A state of emergency due to a viral pandemic is not the time to leave our province without a Minister of Health. A state of emergency linked with an economic collapse is not the time to leave our province without a Minister of Finance. A state of emergency at the start of the school year, with students and teachers terrified of outbreaks in their classrooms, is not the time to leave the province without a Minister of Education.

This is not the time for an unnecessary and self-serving election.

Instead, I would propose returning to the agreement and values that have delivered stability and progress for British Columbians. True collaboration guided by good faith and no surprises. While the mandate outlined in the CASA remains far from complete, it is also clear that COVID-19 has changed how we must approach these commitments.

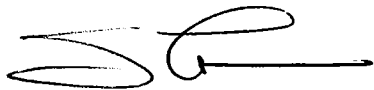
The recovery strategy released yesterday is a promising start, and I was pleased to see so many items that the B.C. Green Caucus advocated for included in the plan. However, there is room for far stronger action and I believe together we can ensure the health of British Columbians is prioritized and a strong, sustainable economic recovery is actioned.

To that end, I have attached to this letter a number of areas that need stronger action that I believe can be the starting place to guide our further work together.

Even as I write this letter, Dr. Henry is imploring British Columbians to shrink their bubble and to reduce public contacts amidst record high case numbers. Triggering a fall election would be to ignore the advice of experts we have long listened to. Let's return to the collaborative work that has been the hallmark of this government.

I look forward to discussing these pressing issues with you and working to get our teams focused, once again, on the best interests of British Columbians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SF', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sonia Furstenau
Leader BC Greens, MLA Cowichan Valley

Making democracy work for people

- Fixed election date - The CASA established a new fixed date election to reduce the politicization of a governing party doing election budgets before an imminent election. We must follow through on this commitment and change what people expect from their politicians.
- DRIPA - Our work to bring the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People is in its infancy. Developing clear working plans that ensure First Nation and Indigenous communities are part of our recovery is essential.

Jobs, climate and a sustainable economy that works for everyone

- Green economy - The recovery strategy released by the NDP falls short of linking our economic recovery to the establishment of a low-carbon and sustainable economy. We should stop subsidizing fossil fuel companies and instead prioritize innovative and sustainable companies based in BC. We also need to create programs that offer pathways for people to have a secure job in sustainable industries and transition away from jobs in sunset industries, all while continuing the work started by CleanBC and closing the gap to meet our emission reduction targets.
- Innovation - The Innovation Commissioner and the Emerging Economy Task Force have both shone a light on the actions needed to build a stronger economy in BC, including building BC businesses into our supply chains, anchoring IP in BC, moving towards a circular economy, and measuring our progress differently. There are some promising initiatives in the recovery plan, but more needs to be done to ensure our economy is stronger and more resilient on the other side of this pandemic.
- Forestry reform - We have not seen significant forestry reform from this government. We have a responsibility to protect what little old growth remains, and ensure that a value added forestry industry that serves the needs of communities can take root in this province.

Fixing the Services People Count on

- Care homes - We need to improve the quality and consistency of care, and take decisive steps to address the gaps we see in for-profit long term care homes.
 - Mental health - COVID-19 has exacerbated that already insufficient support for mental health in our province. We need to expand the access and affordability of support services.
 - Overdose crisis - This issue affects families and communities across our province and needs a systemic change in our approach. Dr. Bonnie Henry has laid out concrete steps the province could and should take to lead the way on a health driven response to this crisis that has killed so many British Columbians.
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- Childcare - COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women. One of the most important areas for us to expand on is the availability and affordability of childcare.
- Endangered species and ecosystems - British Columbians have a visceral connection to the beauty and diversity of life in their province. Not enough has yet been done to protect the biodiversity and natural spaces in our province and we can use the recovery to help bring new protections into place for this incredible place we all call home.

Making life more affordable

- Affordability - Even before COVID-19 the cost of living in this province was continuing to spiral out of control. Our recovery must not be short-sighted about the affordability crisis, and establish long term policies that help people access our housing market.
- Poverty reduction - We should prioritize making reforms to the social welfare system in line with recommendations from the forthcoming Basic Income panel report, which will help us lift people out of poverty, remove stigma and help us meet our poverty reduction targets.
- Genuine progress indicators - work has been underway to develop a genuine progress indicator for BC, and it is more important than ever that we are measuring what actually matters to people as we rebuild the economy.