



Bulletin on the Speech from the Throne

Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

October 5, 2004 – Ottawa

Throne Speech Context

On October 5, the Governor General read the Speech from the Throne to open the First Session of the 38th Parliament. As the first Throne Speech of a minority government since Joe Clark's Progressive Conservative government in 1979, this speech sets the broad policy direction for the government, with few clear nods to opposition priorities. Immediately following, opposition leaders expressed their intentions to move amendments to, and in some cases to vote against, the Speech.

Throne speeches are normally policy and values focussed, painted in broad thematic strokes with little detail on initiatives, funding allocations or operational plans. Yet, they set the tone for the specifics which become clear through legislation and in the next federal budget, which is expected in February or March 2005.

Even more than most, however, this Throne Speech offers very few program or funding indications. The speech itself was much shorter than those written by previous Liberal governments, including Mr Martin's own inaugural speech in February 2004, and notably, there is considerably less here regarding research and post-secondary education. Compared to the Throne Speech in 2002 which clearly addressed and announced funding for the Federation's three key areas – the granting councils, graduate students, and additional indirect costs, there are far fewer references to PSE and research and no suggestion of increases in these areas. Further, most initiatives touching on research are geared directly toward commercialization and technology.

As well as explicitly prioritizing debt reduction and "fiscal discipline", the government commits to a reallocation process, introduced in the 2004 budget and now under the direction of Minister John McCallum, and promises to make decisions among "competing priorities and systematically review all expenditures, reallocating from old to new, from past to future." Along with the absence of increased funding announcements for the granting councils or for indirect costs, this may signal a relatively austere budget in 2005 for research and PSE.

Government Priority Areas

As the Prime Minister's second one within a year, the speech reintroduces many familiar components which are framed within seven guiding principles: fiscal discipline, consensus building, diversity, accountability and reporting issues, inclusion, equality of opportunity and international stature.

It then sets out the following major priority areas: a strong economy, health care, children, caregivers and seniors, aboriginal Canadians, cities and communities, Canada's role in the world, and governance.

Areas of primary interest to the Federation

1. Research

All research measures in the Throne Speech are presented within the context of the government's strategy to improve its global competitiveness and economic strength. It references

previous investments in research, which are pegged at \$13 billion since 1997, and specifically cites the "Canada Foundation for Innovation, health research and other initiatives," but pledges only to "build on this strength", with no specific mention of increased funding.

The National Science Advisor, Arthur Carty, is tasked with helping ensure that research "investments are strategic, focused and delivering results." Emphasis will also be put on a greater integration of the government's in-house science and technology activity.

Two further commitments are commercialization through the supply of venture capital and policies that will "foster Canadian capabilities in key enabling technologies – such as biotechnology, information and communications, and advanced materials." Unfortunately, innovation is still defined in medical and technological terms.

2. Post-Secondary Education

The only reference to post-secondary education is the commitment to increase access by introducing implementation legislation for the Canada Learning Bond initiative, first announced in the 2004 budget, to help low-income families pay for their children's education.

3. Regional development

Support for research and development is listed as part of the government's larger plan of support for regional and rural economic development that will be channelled through regional agencies and programs such as the Atlantic Innovation Fund.

Secondary Areas of Interest

Other areas mentioned that are of interest to the humanities and social sciences research community are:

1. Not-for-Profit Corporations Act

A new Not-for-Profit Corporations Act is announced as a way for the government to foster the social economy, defined as the "myriad not-for-profit activities and enterprises that harness civic and entrepreneurial energies for community benefit." What the legislation will entail and whether this will affect scholarly associations and the Federation is unknown, but the Act is intended to create the "conditions for [not-for-profits'] success, including the business environment within which they work."

2. Canada's tradition of international influence

The Throne Speech recognizes Canada's strengths in governance, rule of law, pluralism and human rights and notes that "Canada's internationalism is a real advantage." This echoes many of the arguments put forward by the Federation and its supporters of the value of the humanities and social sciences in establishing Canada's international reputation in cultural and policy areas and in contributions to international institutions.