

# Deploying the Crown

by BROCK WEIR

"I feel thankful Canadians have been so successful in establishing a vigorous democracy, well-suited to a proud and free people," said the monarch from the Senate throne, which so rarely has its intended occupant in place.

"Surrounded in this historic Chamber by the symbols and records of generations of Canadian legislators, I am very conscious of what Parliament has achieved by transforming these visions and ideals of a great country into the enduring law of the land."

Ahead of this week's blink-and-you'll-miss-it Royal Visit to Ottawa, a quick 24-hours that apparently has quite a lot riding on it, I wanted to do a bit of a deeper dive into what one might expect at Tuesday's Speech from the Throne, which will be formally carried out by the Canadian monarch for the first time in nearly 50 years.

Because this is anything but a typical Throne Speech.

I'm writing this on Sunday evening as the final details of King Charles and Queen Camilla's trip are announced. The above excerpt was from the Throne Speech made by Queen Elizabeth II in 1977, an event planned to coincide with her Silver Jubilee or the 25th anniversary of her ascension to the throne.

Forty-eight years on, the themes so many Canadian politicians expect the King to deliver this week are remarkably similar to the broad strokes in the last speech delivered by the big boss.

It's widely expected that the King, acting on the advice of his Canadian ministers, particularly Prime Minister Mark Carney in the first throne speech of his fledgling government, will emphasize Canada's role as a strong, independent, sovereign nation.

When the late Queen delivered the speech to mark her quarter-century milestone, she marvelled "a generation of Canadians has been born and grown to maturity during my reign. I know you will understand when I say that I have a special interest in these young men and women, contemporaries of my own children.

"They are made strong by the achievements of their parents and grandparents, but not imprisoned by the prejudices of the past; in that sensitivity towards other people, an essence of justice, the generosity and goodwill lie not only in lessons for us all, but the best and surest hope for unity and understanding among Canadians everywhere."

By her death in 2022, in her Platinum Jubilee year, marking a whopping 70 years on the throne, two to three further generations had been born and grown to maturity during her reign. I'm not sure how we fared on the unity and understanding front, but many of the contemporaries of her own children referred to in 1977 are eyeing retirement or even enjoying it as I write, the eldest is now in the role and preparing for a speech which, by the time you read this, could have been a reign-defining moment in his so-called "Maple Kingdom."

But, who is the intended audience for the speech?

Speeches from the Throne, regardless of whether it is delivered by the Monarch in person, or by the Governor General, their day-to-day representative in the country, are not generally events that are all that exciting or chock full of surprises to those who actively follow politics.

Most Canadians, prior to Carney's invitation to the King to deliver his government's agenda, probably haven't lost a whole lot of sleep over whose mouth the words ultimately come from.

The consensus of most pundits is the Prime Minister invited the King to open parliament for the first time in his reign in a bid to send a message to the United States President, who has been rattling his sabres on annexing the Great White North, to underscore Canada's sovereignty by having the actual sovereign in place.

The Prime Minister's words following the announcement the King would be doing just that, didn't exactly throw cold water on this theory.

'This historic honour matches the weight of our times,' he said. 'Canada has a steadfast defender in our sovereign.'

Indeed.

As a long-time admirer of the King through the initiatives and causes he promoted prior to his ascension, and as one who sees the value of an institution such as the monarchy in Canadian life, I'm thrilled that the current government is taking advantage of the resources we have in the Crown and putting it to good use. After all, as the saying goes, if you don't use it, you lose it - and if the government of the day doesn't utilize the monarchy to either of its advantage, the latter will wither in apathy.

I never quite expected the Crown to be used as a middle finger to our southern neighbours, though - but, as we're constantly reminded, we do live in perpetually unprecedented times.

A May 24 piece by Benjamin Lopez Steven for the CBC quotes royal writer Patricia Treble with a particularly apt metaphor.

'King Charles is not a foreign king. When he comes to Canada, he is the Canadian king. He's invited by the government in Ottawa.' Treble described the Canadian Crown as a fire extinguisher that gets dusty and is only used in an emergency. 'It has been tested and it's coming down off the wall,' Treble said. 'And we are going to see it on Monday and Tuesday.'

The article offers another insight from Professor Philippe Lagassé: 'We should also remember our institutions - whether we like them or not, whether or not we want to change them - for now, this is what they are and they are quite significant at this moment.'

But we should not simply think this event is being hosted for an audience of one. In this, his first significant act as King of Canada, it will also be an important milestone in the relationship between the monarch and the people, re-establishing a relationship he honed as heir to the throne, but now in a very different constitutional lens and level of service.

'In ten visits together to Canada, spread over a quarter of a century, seven in the last decade alone, Prince Philip and I have met many thousands of Canadians in all walks of life, of all ages, in every province and territory,' said our monarch of 48-years-ago and three-years-ago. 'My happiest memories of our travels throughout Canada have been these individual contacts, which have revealed the enormous strength and astonishing diversity of this nation.'

'I have always been full of admiration for what Canada is. The new generation fill me with confidence for what Canada can become.'

I'm not sure what she would make of our present situation, but, by my estimation the enormous strength and astonishing diversity of this nation endures and supports one another. Let's hope this week's visit is the first of many, and that the King has many official opportunities ahead to forge these bonds that strengthen the very institution within the country in which it will be dusted off and deployed this week.