

October 9, 2017  
(May Letter)

Dear Samantha,

Since I am so far behind in my letters, this letter may seem out of place, but it is one I started to compose in July after we had a nice chat on Skype. The content is still relevant, however.

Thanks for Skyping me last July. It reminded me of the lovely exchange we had when you were much younger – when you were home on your own reading the Titanic story. It made me feel like I was able to hang out with you in a casual manner – even though we were more than 5,000 kilometres apart.

On our call, you mentioned that you did not know the policies of the NDP government which was in the process of taking control of the BC government. I was following that process closely at that time since it is very rare that an election outcome is so close. Under these circumstances, the procedure is one where each party tries to figure out whether it has enough members to lead the government and if it doesn't, then the other parties can try to make it happen. It is a procedure that we inherited from England that means a confidence vote in the assembly is always a big deal since the loss of such a vote means that something must be done to change the whole government.

Only certain bills involve a confidence vote. One of them is the tabling of the annual budget (like in the case of BC) but there are other ones that involve significant spending that can be declared as issues of confidence.

Since the BC Liberals won 43 seats, the NDP won 41, and the Greens won 3, the Liberals did not have enough members in the assembly to pass key bills of the two opposition parties all voted against it. This is what happened when the budget was tabled the other week. It meant that the Governor General gets to decide what will happen next and this time she chose to invite the NDP and Green parties to see if they had enough votes to form the election. If they all voted together, they have 44 votes, so it would be enough to defeat the Liberals.

The problem is, that the assembly has to choose a Speaker for the Assembly. If the Speaker is an NDP or Green, then they would have only 43 votes (the same as the Liberals) so they are back in a situation where they don't have a majority. Under these circumstances, the Speaker gets to break the tie, but the convention is that the Speaker's vote usually goes to the least radical choice. It will be interesting to see how this hurdle is resolved! Since I wrote this a few months ago, this issue has been resolved because a Liberal MP agreed to be the speaker. This means that the Liberals will have one less person (now 42) and the NDP plus Greens still have 44.

In any case, I thought you should know what the key policies of the various parties are since the choices to be made in BC will be rather important over the next 4 or so years. Here's the lists I found on the web.

Liberals (<https://www.bcliberals.com/platform/>): I will list the policies which the Liberals proposed during the election campaign. After they realized they might lose confidence, Clark came out with a number of proposals in the budget speech that reversed several of these policies to look more like those in the other parties. This is one of the problems with the Liberals – they are willing to abandon their principles to gain power.

- Freeze personal income taxes
- Eliminate the BC government's operating debt by 2021
- Build the Site-C hydroelectric dam
- Build a pipeline to the coast for Fort McMurray products
- Allow anyone to donate as much money as they want to the political parties

NDP (<https://www.bcndp.ca/platform/>):

- \$10/day daycare
- Eliminate MSP fees

- Freeze ICBC, BC Ferry, BC Hydro rates and roll back fares and tolls
- \$15/hr minimum wage by 2021
- Reduce the cost of prescription drugs
- Capping tuition fee increases
- Make student loans interest free
- Restore BC Bus Pass program for people on disabilities

Do any of these sound promising to you?

Of course, once a party gets into power, there are often obstacles to the fulfillment of their promises that arise. I notice, however, that the NDP has already eliminated tolls on the Port Mann and Golden Ears bridges. I'm hoping that they will continue to follow through on many of the other promises they made. Don't forget that they need plenty of support from BC residents to make it possible since there will be many people who do not approve of their plans or simply don't like them for various reasons. It's worth it to learn a little bit about the various positions if you wish to help.

Love,  
Bill