

# Clark points to Liberal LNG work; NDP to firings, Virk issues

The Canadian Press

VICTORIA — Premier Christy Clark says her government set the stage this fall for the development of a liquefied natural gas industry in British Columbia, even though the Opposition New Democrats say she spent more time away from the legislature than inside debating issues.

Clark said the Liberals accomplished what they set out to do over the past six weeks – passing three major pieces of LNG-linked legislation covering taxes, emissions standards and aboriginal involvement. She said the laws set the ground rules for oil and gas companies to develop the potentially lucrative industry and give people in the province a better vision of what to expect from the industry.

But the government is still waiting for what it says are 18 potential LNG deals.

“We needed to pass the LNG legislation on the tax and on the environmental side,” Clark said Thursday. “That was crucial to getting the LNG industry up and going. We got that done.”

Clark has said the industry will create up to 100,000 jobs and rival Alberta’s oilsands in economic potential.

Industry officials reacted favourably to the 3.5 per cent tax, as well as the emissions standards that Environment Minister Mary Polak said will make B.C.’s industry the cleanest in the world.

“We have accomplished those things precisely in the way we hoped to,” said Liberal House Leader Mike de Jong as the session concluded.

“We were seeking to achieve a balance... between securing a fair return for British Columbians as the owner of the resource and ensuring we had a competitive jurisdiction that would attract investors.”

When the government introduced the LNG income tax legislation last month, it said one mid-sized LNG plant would pay about \$800 million in taxes annually, which is equivalent to the taxes B.C.’s forest industry pays each year. One plant producing 12 million tonnes of LNG annually would pay up to \$9 billion in taxes over 10 years.

However, competition has been increasing and natural gas prices have been declining, and companies with huge plans for the northwest coast are still hedging on final investment decisions.

On the opening day of the session last month, Malaysian energy giant Petronas, which is planning a multibillion-dollar LNG export facility near Prince Rupert, said it might delay development for a decade unless it could reach cost and environmental agreements with provincial and federal governments.

Clark rejected Opposition sug-



CLARK

gestions that her government was downplaying its LNG expectations, after the throne speech did not repeat past statements that the industry would create 100,000 new jobs and eliminate a provincial debt that’s higher than \$60 billion.

New Democrat Leader John Horgan said the session was about more than LNG. He said it was dominated by a botched investigation that led to the firing of eight health researchers, the refusal of Advanced Education Minister Amrik Virk to vacate his cabinet post despite his interference in a university hiring process, and the premier’s poor attendance.

“All we hear about is we’re going to get 18 LNG facilities, and nobody believes that either.”

The researchers were fired two years ago after a probe investigated their relationship with employees of the B.C. Pharmacare program. The province has since settled three wrongful dismissal lawsuits and reinstated two employees. Clark and Health Minister Terry Lake have also apologized to the family of another fired employee Roderick MacIsaac, a co-op student who committed suicide.

The government appointed Vic-

toria labour lawyer Marcia McNeil to review the issue, but Graham Whitmarsh, the former top bureaucrat connected to the firings, has refused to participate.

Horgan called the review process a sham.

A report last summer found that Virk was part of a volunteer board at Surrey’s Kwantlen Polytechnic University which broke disclosure guidelines involving topping up salaries to hire executives. The NDP has since repeatedly asked that Virk resign his cabinet seat or be dumped by Clark. The party released new emails this session indicating that Virk, a former Mountie, used his RCMP account to offer board members hiring information.

Horgan criticized Clark’s attendance record at the legislature after her flight to Victoria was cancelled due to foggy weather but NDP members were able to find their way to Victoria.

“It’s not Gilligan’s Island, it’s Vancouver Island,” he said.

“There are boats. There are other planes. I’m getting a very favourable response and I don’t think the premier’s comfortable with that. She prefers to be in the limousine or the Helijet. I prefer to be with people.”

# Top court agrees to hear impaired driving cases

The Canadian Press

VICTORIA — The Supreme Court of Canada has agreed to hear a pair of British Columbia cases involving seven drivers stopped by police at roadside checks.

One of the cases involves a man who got a warning reading after blowing into a roadside screening device.

Lee Michael Wilson received a three-day driving ban in September 2012 after the roadside device registered a blood-alcohol level in the warning range.

An officer noted Wilson had an odour of liquor on his breath and Wilson admitted to having four beers hours earlier.

Wilson was subsequently issued a three-day driving prohibition, but he challenged that, arguing there was no evidence, other than the warn reading, that his ability to drive was affected by alcohol.

A B.C. Supreme Court judge agreed and dismissed the roadside prohibition.

But the B.C. Court of Appeal later overturned the lower court’s ruling.

The other case involves six B.C. drivers who either refused to give a breath sample or registered a fail on a roadside screening device.

They were issued 90-day

roadside driving prohibitions but challenged the law, saying the provincial government’s amendments to impaired driving laws went beyond its jurisdiction and violated their charter rights.

Under the law, drivers found to have a blood alcohol content of .05 or over are registered in the warn range by the screening device and given a three-day driving suspension.

Motorists with a level of .08 or over are registered by the device in the fail range and get an automatic 90-day driving prohibition, the same as for drivers who refuse to provide breath samples.

Drivers who fail or refuse roadside screening tests can also be fined up to \$500, have their licences suspended, their vehicles seized and be required to pay for remedial driving programs.

The total cost, including impoundment, towing and storage fees and the use and installation of an ignition interlock device, aside from legal costs, is estimated at \$4,060.

B.C.’s Attorney General Suzanne Anton said Thursday that the province is very confident about its program but that she didn’t wish to comment much more while the case is before the high court “except I will add, of course, that we calculated that it has saved 227 lives over the last three years.

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