

On May 14, 3.1 million British Columbia registered voters will be eligible to cast their vote to elect the 85 members of the Legislative Assembly in the 40th Provincial General Election. Voters, understandably, have a number of concerns with respect to issues such as health care, education and the province's economic situation.

Valued at approximately \$15 billion, B.C.'s residential-construction industry is our second largest Gross Domestic Product contributor, major job creator and an extremely important economic driver. In the lead-up to the election, the Canadian Home Builders' Association of British Columbia (CHBA BC), which represents more than 1,870 member companies in the homebuilding and renovation industry, asked the four major party leaders how they plan to support this vital industry, should they be elected.

Leaders surveyed included Christy Clark (BC Liberal Party), John Cummins (BC Conservatives), Jane Sterk (Green Party of BC) and Adrian Dix (NDP). Each leader was asked to respond to six questions, outlining their positions on the establishment of a ministry for market housing, the Property Transfer Tax, mandatory licensing for new builders, a training-tax credit for residential-construction employers, apprentice hiring and affordable market housing.

1. B.C. is known across Canada for having one of the best social-housing programs in the country. However, the market residential-construction industry is the province's second-largest GDP contributor, a job creator and an extremely important economic driver, with an estimated \$15 billion value – yet there is not a specific ministry to support market housing in B.C. If elected on May 14, what will your government do to ensure a specific ministry is created to ensure support for market housing, one of the province's most crucial industries?

BC Liberals (Christy Clark)

Today's BC Liberals appreciate the contribution that the market-residential construction industry makes to British Columbia. We believe there should be limited government intervention in market housing except for programs that facilitate entry into the market, such as for first-time homebuyers, and to ensure that homes are built safely and meet specified criteria. As you note in your question, market housing has a very large effect on British Columbia's economy and it is difficult to conceptualize it in a single ministry, given how many areas and levels of government it touches. Today's BC Liberals are committed to controlling government spending and keeping taxes low for business. We do not believe that creating additional government ministries or having bigger government is achieved by having a huge cabinet or increasing the number of cabinet ministers.

BC Conservatives (John Cummins)

We are committed to keeping taxes low for individuals and businesses, and are the only party that is not proposing a corporate-tax increase or a personal-tax increase. By taking smart steps like eliminating the carbon tax, we will make B.C. even more attractive for businesses to operate in. We believe in smaller government that allows businesses and individuals to make more of their own choices, allowing businesses to create opportunities for British Columbians.

As such, it would be inappropriate to add to the size of government by creating a new ministry. We will, however, work with the market-residential-construction industry to ensure that one of B.C.'s most important industries has a healthy environment in which to conduct business.

Green Party (Jane Sterk)

To deal with the issues of housing affordability in the longer term, BC Greens will establish a provincial housing program. We will work with local governments as partners to ensure that an adequate percentage of newly built housing is affordable. We will also advocate for a national housing program. BC Greens would also mandate that BC Housing purchase existing units of market housing that in current or stalled projects to provide an immediate and expanding pool of permanent below market and market rental housing.

NDP (Adrian Dix)

The residential-construction industry is an important economic driver for the provincial economy. Ensuring the province's market-residential construction is supported by a BC NDP government will be a priority.

2. The Property Transfer Tax (PTT) in B.C. is a regressive tax that adds a burden on to B.C. homebuyers at all levels since the Vander Zalm government first introduced this tax in 1987. The PTT is often triple-charged on the same piece of land, while its structure has not changed since 1987. With \$778 million from PTT expected from B.C. consumers in 2012/2013 and a further \$725 million expected in 2013/2014, B.C.'s PTT is the highest provincial-property tax in the entire country by far. If elected on May 14, how will your government change the way this tax is structured, calculated and collected?

BC Liberals (Christy Clark)

The Property Transfer Tax (PTT) is expected to bring in just under \$900 million in revenue this year, and helps fund the wide range of programs and services that British Columbians rely on. At a time when the BC Liberal government is working hard to manage spending and balance the budget to keep our debt affordable for future generations, any decision on reducing taxes needs to be made very carefully. The PTT is reviewed every year to consider whether changes are appropriate. If re-elected, the BC Liberals will continue to look closely at the thresholds. Today's BC Liberals will not risk going back into deficit. Until we secure a much stronger fiscal position we are unlikely to change the Property Transfer Tax.

BC Conservatives (John Cummins)

The BC Conservatives believe in fair taxes. We are committed to reviewing our various taxes, licenses, and fees in order to reduce Liberal inefficiencies.

Green (Jane Sterk)

There are some British Columbians who would like to own their own homes but whose income limits their options. BC Greens believe more British Columbians should have the opportunity to own their own homes through co-op shares, strata title or other innovative

programs. As well, zoning and title restrictions could be eased to allow for gradual tenant-directed conversion of rental buildings to home ownership. Facilitating co-housing projects may also provide an option for home ownership. Thinking long term, BC Greens will establish a provincial housing program.

NDP (Adrian Dix)

The BC NDP will not be making any changes to the Property Transfer Tax at this time but will continue to discuss this and other issues of concern with the residential-construction sector.

3. The residential-construction industry in B.C. came together under the auspices of the Homeowner Protection Office (HPO) in 2006 to begin a three-year process to raise the bar of professionalism in the province's residential-construction industry. Consensus was met and the creation of the Professional Builders' Institute (PBI) began, requiring that licensing be mandatory for the approximately 200 newcomers who enter the industry each year. If elected May 14, what will your government do to ensure that rhetoric is set aside and that the residential-construction sector's needs are acknowledged by following the established industry consensus?

BC Liberals (Christy Clark)

In 2005, the BC Liberal government released a discussion paper entitled "Raising the Bar: Enhancing professionalism in B.C.'s residential-construction industry" and held consultations throughout the province. The proposals were for increased standards for builder licensing to include minimum education and training requirements. After positive results from the consultation, we established a collaborative process to develop an enhanced system of builder licensing. An industry task group made recommendations in 2006 and 2008 which included core competencies for different categories of licences, a continuing professional-development component and increased standards for new entrants. The enhanced requirements would only apply to builders who construct residential buildings of one to four units and provide that all current licenced builders would be grandfathered into the new system.

BC Conservatives (John Cummins)

The BC Conservatives will do what it takes to work with B.C. industry in establishing the kind of standards that B.C. consumers need.

Green (Jane Sterk)

BC Greens are committed to working closely with BC communities and organizations to form and execute policy that reflects the needs of British Columbians. Since affordable and attainable housing is a top green priority, BC Greens are more than willing to communicate and get ideas on policies from groups like the PBI.

NDP (Adrian Dix)

The BC NDP will take further steps to protect consumers and continue to work with the

residential-construction industry on qualifications as a condition of licensing.

4. Residential construction is the bellwether of economic prosperity in B.C., creating more than 127,500 person years of employment each year and \$6.6 billion in wages. Each house sold produces \$60,000 in spinoff spending. Ongoing, meaningful and relevant apprenticeship training specific to residential construction is essential to ensure the continuing growth and prosperity of the province's homebuilding and renovation community.

If elected on May 14: **a)** Will your government support and employ a meaningful training-tax credit for residential construction employers?

BC Liberals (Christy Clark)

Today's BC Liberals are proud of our record on skills training. There are more apprentices in B.C. than ever before and skills training is no longer union owned and operated. The BC Liberal government extended approximately \$31 million in annual funding for the BC Training Tax Credit program through 2014 to help employers and apprentices get the skills and training they need. The program provides employers with refundable tax credits for salary and wages paid by employers to eligible apprentices. Apprentices registered in an eligible program can also obtain a refundable personal income tax credit.

BC Conservatives (John Cummins)

At this point, we don't have a specific plan to introduce a training-tax credit for residential construction employers. In the next ten years, however, more than one million new jobs will open up in B.C. and the BC Conservatives believe in doing what it takes to ensure that young British Columbians have the requisite education and training to fill those jobs.

Green (Jane Sterk)

BC Greens are committed to supporting and expanding training programs. BC Greens are also committed to supporting small businesses that take green business initiatives. BC Greens will provide Small Power Producer (SPPs) Loan Guarantees: interest-free loans for small and mid-sized businesses to install green energy solutions, as well as Clean Air Tax Credits for green business initiatives. BC Greens would work with employers to guarantee apprenticeship spaces and provide funding to support new and existing spaces. BC Greens would also create tax benefits for companies that provide on-site childcare, flex-hours, and job sharing. BC Greens would provide employment assistance for individuals, businesses, and community organizations.

NDP (Adrian Dix)

The BC NDP is committed to a strong skills-training and apprenticeship system to meet the growing needs of B.C.'s labour market, including the construction industry. For more information please go to www.bcndp.ca.

b) What will your government's position be on limiting the number of apprentices a company can hire?

BC Liberals (Christy Clark)

If re-elected, Today's BC Liberals have no plans to set a maximum number of apprentices that a company can employ.

BC Conservatives (John Cummins)

The BC Conservatives are committed to ensuring that young British Columbians have the education that they need to fill the jobs that will open up in the next ten years. At the same time, this means ensuring that apprenticeship completion rates keep pace with the rising number of apprentices in B.C.

Green (Jane Sterk)

BC Greens are committed to developing a system of industry-based funding of job training programs in line with European Systems of apprenticeships and partnerships. BC Greens would establish a comprehensive trades training and apprenticeship model to support all Canadian citizens and Permanent Residents living in BC have access to a full range of affordable public post-secondary education, including vocational and trades training and apprenticeships.

NDP (Adrian Dix)

Making BC's skills training and apprenticeship program work better for both employers and apprentices is a key priority. Please go www.bcndp.ca for more information.

5. Affordable market housing is a major issue throughout British Columbia. If elected on May 14, what will your government do to ensure affordable market housing becomes attainable for all B.C. families?

BC Liberals (Christy Clark)

Today's BC Liberals recognize the critical importance of affordable housing, which is reflected in the investments we have made. Over the last decade, we have invested \$3.2 billion to provide affordable housing for low-income individuals, seniors and families in communities across the province. As a result, close to 21,000 new housing units have been completed, are under development or have had funding committed. We have also established and expanded a number of programs to deliver affordable market housing to B.C. families. The First Time Home Buyers' Program helps British Columbians buying their first home with an exemption from the Property Transfer Tax on homes valued up to \$425,000. In 2008, the market-value threshold for homes was increased by more than \$100,000 to \$425,000 so that even more homebuyers will benefit. In 2012, we launched two programs to support market-

housing renovations in the homes of seniors. We created a new refundable personal-income tax credit of up to \$1,000 to help individuals aged 65 and over with the cost of permanent home renovations. And we created the Home Adaptations for Independence (HAFI) program, which helps low-income seniors and people with disabilities finance home modifications for accessible, safe and independent living. Eligible homeowners and landlords can receive up to \$20,000 per home, in the form of a forgivable loan.

BC Conservatives (John Cummins)

The biggest issue here is that BC families shouldn't be taxed to the point where they can no longer buy affordable market housing. The BC Conservatives are committed to not raising taxes for the next five years, so that B.C. families can get the housing start that they need.

Green (Jane Sterk)

The Green Party of British Columbia believes in a policy of Universal Housing: that among other basic human rights is the right of every person in British Columbia to have access to safe and affordable housing. BC Greens would invest one-half of one percent of the budget into housing to increase the number of units of quality housing available for below-market rentals. BC Greens support a housing first policy with adequate social supports for those made difficult to house because of social, mental health or addictions issues. A 'Genuine Livable Income' strategy will be instrumental in addressing the housing crisis. BC Greens believe there should be a large supply of good quality rental housing. BC Greens would investigate ways to increase the amount of housing that is purpose built as rental housing or converted to rental, including the potential for using government or tax incentives. There are some British Columbians who would like to own their own homes but whose income limits their options. BC Greens believe more British Columbians should have the opportunity to own their own homes through co-op shares, strata title or other innovative programs. As well, zoning and title restrictions could be eased to allow for gradual tenant-directed conversion of rental buildings to home ownership. Facilitating co-housing projects may also provide an option for home ownership.

NDP (Adrian Dix)

The BC NDP believes that market housing must be more attainable to families in B.C. The BC NDP are interested in working with the private sector to explore ways to increase the stock of affordable market-rental housing in communities across the province.

When the B.C. electorate casts its votes on May 14, the state of the provincial economy will be front and centre. With this in mind, our residential-construction industry will play a major role in ensuring a healthy economic climate. There have been challenges certainly – the HST's negative impact on housing and government's ever-increasing tax burdens at all levels. B.C.'s housing industry, in its long history, has proved highly professional, always resilient, adhering to rigorous standards of excellence and contributing more than \$15 billion to the economy. Our industry members are the best trained and most skilled, the industry itself renowned for its innovation, excellence of design and quality of product. Those standing for



election of our major political parties should recognize, support and ensure our residential-construction industry remains strong and viable. It has been shown time and time again, that as the housing market goes, so does the economy!