

Check Against Delivery

**Hon. Bill Bennett, Minister of State for Mining
Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources**

**BCIT, Mining Technology Program Address
Burnaby, B.C.
January 18, 2006**

Good morning, everyone.

You probably all know that the mining industry is going through a transformation in this province today. When I was first elected, in 2001, and Minister Neufeld started working with what was then, I think, a fairly discouraged industry, exploration companies in B.C. invested in 2001, \$29 million; that was it for the whole year. The industry, at that time, was a shadow of its former self, and many in the industry had already fled British Columbia for places like Chile where apparently, they had friendlier governments in those days. I daresay there were as many geologists driving cabs in Vancouver as there were working in the mineral exploration business.

Fortunately, those dark days are behind us. Today it's my pleasure to announce that mineral exploration investment in 2005 grew an astonishing 660 per cent, from 2001. In 2005 the total investment in B.C. for mineral exploration was a staggering \$220 million; that's the highest amount since 1990 and one of the highest amounts for mineral exploration ever in the history of the province. If you'll forgive the pun, it's an earth-shattering achievement for just four years.

As minister I get to travel around the province. I have a very good job; I think I have the best job in government. Mining is so positive these days, and you get to travel around to some very, very beautiful places where they do mining. I visit the operating mines, and I visit the exploration sites.

I've been to places like Galore Creek, which is the largest exploration camp or project in the province. There are 200 workers there, and I got to have lunch with a bunch of the workers and tour that world-class opportunity. That, someday, will be a big, important mine in B.C.

I visited with a heavy-duty mechanic and jumbo drill operator at Eskay Creek. Both of those workers were Tahltan First Nations people.

Check Against Delivery

I've sat in a huge haul truck. I think it was one of those big 240- or 260-tonne haul trucks. I sat right up in the driver's seat and had my picture taken.

I've been up close with a lot of open-pit mining operations around the province: the five coal mines in the southeast, where I come from, in the Cranbrook–Elk Valley area; Mount Polley; Gibraltar, and, of course, Highland Valley Copper.

Really, there's a lot of really interesting people in this industry. When you meet people in the mining industry, what you find out about them is they're very positive, they're very optimistic. They're the kind of people that are always "glass half full". They're very straightforward and eager. They're just great people to work with. It's been a pleasure for me to be associated with them.

I think you'll find when you get out into the industry, it's the same thing for you.

It's also a pleasure for me to be here at BCIT this morning. I've got a couple of sons who are not too far off your age — looking out. You're the future of the industry, and it's important that you know that. It's important that you're taking the courses that you are, here at BCIT, because the industry needs you. In fact, to be honest, they needed you yesterday.

So finish up, get your education, and get out there, and get working.

I brought some of the new maps with us today that the ministry is releasing. There's one of them over here.

Thanks to Minister Neufeld, actually, and a group of generous volunteers, including Dave, over here, B.C. leads our nation in terms of how we manage geoscience and how we fund geoscience. We also lead the country and, probably, the world, from what I'm told by the industry, in terms of map place and the kinds of very useful maps that are being developed to direct and encourage exploration over these next several years.

This particular map shows communities that are close to existing operating mines and many of the major exploration sites.

I'm a rural guy. I was born and raised in a small town, and I've always lived, all my life, in Canada in smaller towns.

Check Against Delivery

I've seen firsthand what mining can do for communities. Mining is a great industry because of the kinds of jobs and the kinds of spin-off benefits that you get. Places like the communities in the Elk Valley, like Smithers, like Prince George, like Kamloops, Williams Lake — all are sustained by the mining industry.

I think it's important for me to say this morning that mining will also help us as a province to meet some of the challenges that are going to be coming forward from the pine beetle epidemic. We have the potential in this province, and we'll realize that potential, I believe, to open up new mines. Those new mines will employ people that perhaps may not be able to be employed any longer in the forest industry, say, seven to ten years from now when we start to run out of fibre.

Mining jobs are high-paying jobs. Are you happy to hear that? Right on. They are; they're high-paying jobs; they're good jobs.

I think it's also important to say, often actually, that mining jobs are also very often high-tech jobs — unlike the stereotype. As you folks know better than anybody, mining jobs are high-tech jobs.

Mining jobs in this province are also safe jobs, and I think that's really important, as well. Oil and gas, and mining are the safest heavy industries in British Columbia. So that's important to you; it's important to us as well.

All in all, I would say to you as students being educated to work in the mining industry: you have chosen wisely; congratulations for that.

Over the past couple of years commodity prices have gone up; I'm sure you've noticed. You know, people ask has that had a positive impact on mining exploration investment. Well, of course, it has; of course, it's had a positive impact.

But if you ask the mining industry what else has happened since 2001 to increase exploration investment by over 600 per cent in four years, they will tell you that the provincial government's attention to making the approval processes more timely and more transparent has been a key to that transformation. I think they will also tell you that there's much more confidence in British Columbia today than before because the industry knows that there is a government in Victoria

Check Against Delivery

that believes in mining and is prepared to invest the time and the resources to get mining going again.

The B.C. mineral titles on-line program is one of those investments. Again, thanks to Minister Neufeld, over this past year, just in its first year of operation, mineral titles on-line registered 16,000 claims, just in the past year, in its first year of operation. That was an increase over 2004 of 350 per cent.

We're working on the mining plan, the B.C. mining plan, to meet the goals that we've set out, there, for everyone to see. We've cut red tape, and we've worked with the industry on government policy to make B.C. a more attractive jurisdiction to invest in. We're not done yet; I don't think we'll ever be done.

But we're increasing exploration investment by six times: I think that's a very good start. Going from having only one mining project in the environmental assessment pipeline — which is what we had in 2001 — to over 20 mining projects in the environmental assessment process: I think that's also part of that really good start.

The bottom line for us is we know that you..., we know that British Columbians want good jobs. We know that you also want your government to have the revenue to be able to build the new hospitals and highways and all the things that you expect from the province. We can only do that if we have a strong economy, and, of course, mining is a big part of that.

I do have the information with regard to how the \$220 million breaks down in each of the regions. I'm not going to go over that in my speech here this morning, but I can tell you that each area of the province is very well-represented. There was a significant increase in investment in all the areas.

I want to tell you that we chose to come to BCIT today because of your training program and the great work that this school is doing and that you are doing to create this new generation of skilled workers. We realize, and I know industry realizes, that there is a real challenge coming down the pipe — in fact, it's probably here — in terms of the need for skilled workers not only in the mining industry and the oil and gas industry but in all industries. But in particular, the mining industry is going to be short skilled people. When I was at Eskay Creek last summer, one of the things I noticed was that all the workers were about my age. That makes them really old, so, you know, we need you folks.

Check Against Delivery

I want to thank you all again for sharing in this event here today with myself and Minister Neufeld. At \$220 million, mining in B.C. once again becomes a sustainable, long-term industry, with enough exploration happening to find the new deposits that eventually will turn into new mines.

I want to thank the mining exploration industry in B.C. and investors who have placed their faith once again in this province, and with a little help from us, your government, we can look forward, I think, to continued growth in the mining industry. I look forward to the day, actually, when we can brag about opening up a new Highland Valley Copper or a new Eskay Creek. That's what we need in this province. They're out there, we know they're out there, and now we have a real chance of finding them.

Thank you.

- 30 -