

Mineral Exploration Roundup 2006

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**HONOURABLE BILL BENNETT
MINISTER OF STATE FOR MINING
MINISTRY OF ENERGY, MINES AND PETROLEUM RESOURCES**

Opening Remarks

**Mineral Exploration Roundup 2006
Stanley Park Ballroom – Westin Bayshore, Vancouver
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Thank you for the kind introduction Nicole and Glen, and good morning.

I want to thank Dan Jepson and David Caulfield all the good people at the Association for Mineral Exploration BC, for pulling together another great Roundup this year.

We appreciate all the hard work you guys do. I've enjoyed working with David, who's coming to the end of his reign as president, replaced by Rob Pease.

Thanks to everyone for coming out this early, I know that Yukon Night was last night and traditionally that's a fun night, which might explain the few empty chairs this morning.

2005 was a banner year for mining in BC. Exploration expenditures were more than \$220 million – up 660 per cent from when I was first elected in 2001.

Here's a quote about success that I really like.

“A successful person is a person who can lay a foundation with the bricks that others throw at him”

Throughout the 1990s there were enough bricks tossed at your industry in BC to build another Great Wall.

A great wall of bureaucracy, a great wall of inertia, a great wall to ensure that investment money didn't accidentally seep in.

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Our government has been busy tearing that wall down brick by brick. The battle days are over, and it's not just because of mineral prices. Our government is committed to a vibrant mining sector in this province.

You'll hear it from our Premier Gordon Campbell tomorrow, you heard it from my colleague Dick Neufeld yesterday, and you'll hear it again from me here today.

We value what you do. That great wall of indifference has come down, and it's gone for good.

It's been one of the great experiences for me in this job is to go on a walkabout around BC to take a look at some of the operating mines and some of the exploration projects. My plan is to go to all 16 mines.

I've also been to exploration projects in the East Kootenays, where I'm from. I've been to Galore Creek and Red Chris up in the Northwest, and to some of the projects in central BC, such as New Afton.

It all starts with exploration. It takes a consistent amount of exploration annually to develop the range of opportunities that are necessary to get new mines that we need to replace the old mines that inevitably run out.

Frankly, with the huge amount of mining dollars that are generated right here in Vancouver, I would like to see British Columbia get a far greater share of that investment.

\$220 million in exploration investment is a good starting point, I don't think it should be our end goal, I think it should be our starting place.

Exploration activity in BC is exceedingly important for it's own intrinsic benefits to our people here in the province of BC, and to our public services. I also think it's really important for me to say as Minister, that the ultimate goal is to get some new mines in this province, in particular, new metal mines.

That's my goal, and I'm going to do everything I can to convince you that we, as government will do everything we can do to get you on the road, and I will work hard to make sure we get opportunities to open new mines.

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Mining in this province is a first rate industry. It is a high tech industry, it is a very safe industry, and a very generous industry for those who work in it.

And all this good happens on 0.03 percent of our land base, a tiny foot print for a \$5 billion industry that provides good jobs for all of our communities. That's less than all our parking lots in BC combined.

My ministry in British Columbia has become a world leader in environmental management, with some of the best reclamation practices in the planet. Within that context, we will move heaven and earth to keep the permitting process moving along, and to respect the investment in resources.

I was reading the Globe and Mail the other day, and noticed a few dozen jobs being advertised in Tumbler Ridge. Now, these are not entry level jobs. These are jobs that feed family and sustain communities.

NovaGold spent \$50 million dollars last year, and had 200 people working at their exploration project at Galore Creek. Highland Valley Copper has an overall economic impact of a billion dollars a year in our provincial economy. Their payroll in Kamloops is \$100 million per year.

Do you think the people in Kamloops believe in mining? You bet they do.

Do you think the people in the Kootenays believe in mining? With five active coal mines, the Trail smelter and the legacy of the Sullivan Mine. You bet they do.

Do you think the people in the Cariboo believe in mining? With the re-opening of Mount Polley and Gibraltar, not to mention the downturn in forestry due to the pine beetle? Of course they do.

It's very important for me to be here today to tell you that British Columbia believes in mining.

Let me take this time to talk about what this government has done and what our plans are for the future for mining throughout the province.

The BC Mining Plan was announced last year and we are well on our way to working through that. A great blueprint for the industry.

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Our government created Mineral Titles Online one year ago, and already registration of claims staked is up 350 percent from last year.

Right now we are working towards the development of an on-line permitting system, which will bring us ahead of most of the other jurisdictions in the world.

We got rid of a third of our regulations, we are still working hard to refine process and find ways to make it simple.

I want to take a moment to thank the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources staff for the great work they do, for the elected people, mostly for the people of British Columbia, and for you the industry. We have a great working relationship that we will continue to build upon, we really are here to help you.

The Premier has used the term “New Relationship” and my colleague Tom Christensen was here yesterday and spoke about the New Relationship, and I’d like to add a few comments.

First Nations people of this country have been on the outside for far too long. Although intentions have been good, results have not been so good. I’ve spent a lot of time working with First Nations people, and we all want the same thing.

We all want good jobs, a decent place to live and raise our kids, good schools and health services, respect and opportunities. The New Relationship is a common desire to build a strong and prosperous province. It won’t be easy, and it won’t be simple, but the rewards are there for those of us who work at it.

It is a relationship between cultures, between independent people, based on respect and a common desire to build a stronger, more prosperous province for us and for our children and grandchildren.

We got rid of over a third of all government regulations in our first term and Premier Campbell continues to ask us to find other ways to simplify our processes to make BC the most competitive jurisdiction there is.

We’ve also been working with the federal government to streamline their approval processes, especially at the DFO and Environment Canada.

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You've heard we got a new crew in Ottawa. We will gladly work with the new federal government.

We will do our best to show the new federal government the benefits of reinstating their flow through exploration tax incentives.

Of course, the BC government has extended our own mining exploration tax credit for another 10 years. We also eliminated the corporate capital tax, did away with sales tax on mining machinery and equipment and we reduced corporate income tax to 12 percent.

And we are prepared in the future, to consider any good ideas you have for tax reform that will drive additional mining investment in BC. Bring your ideas to us through the Association of Mineral Exploration and the MABC.

On the human resource front we've established a BC Mining Education Network to get more young people interested in mining. We've committed considerable public resources for training and education for communities and first nations.

More than four thousand seasonal field jobs were created due to exploration alone last year. That's double the number from the year before.

And we are going to help address your manpower needs with new initiatives.

I am pleased to announce today the Mining and Minerals division of the Ministry will hold several job and career fairs throughout this province.

The **"Mining Rocks: Career and Job Opportunities Tour"** will help raise awareness about mining job opportunities, and let people know about the future of mining.

We're going to work with your industry to target communities for recruitment and public education forums.

The tour will be modeled on the successful Oil and Gas Job Fairs the province hosted last fall.

Our government's strategic plan for the next decade includes creating more jobs per capita than anywhere else in the country.

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We need the skilled workforce for all the new jobs that the private sector is creating and we will do our part.

This tour is also an important opportunity to show the people of British Columbia how important mining and exploration is in this province.

The first stop on the Mining Rocks tour is Smithers on February 22nd.

I hope many of you from the Northwest can help get the word out.

The results of our work in government and your work in the field are plain to see.

Exploration activity as I mentioned has grown 660% since 2001. There were 650 exploration projects underway in 2005. There are over 20 mining projects in the EA pipeline, versus only one in 2001.

I think it is fair to say, mining is back in British Columbia!

So thank you for your time this morning.

Thank you for your interest in British Columbia.

Have a great conference, make some deals...

...and let's get out there and build some new mines!