

*Check Against Delivery*

**Bill Bennett, Minister of State for Mining**  
**Ministry of Energy Mines and Petroleum Resources**  
**Speech to B.C. Yukon Chamber of Mines**  
Keynote Speaker – Breakfast Kick-off Series  
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*Check Against Delivery*

Thank you for the warm introduction.

Not too many years ago, a Minister responsible for Mining in BC would not have heard such kind words.

That was a time when people in this room did some of their best work.

... in places like Australia, Chile and Kazakhstan.

It was a time when geologists who stayed in BC were gainfully employed –

...as waiters and cab drivers!

It was a time when the investment community poured millions into mining

...in Australia, Chile and Kazakhstan.

Experts in your industry tell me that this period is known in geological terms as the “Period of Great Darkness”.

There were no dinosaurs back then, but the government of the day sure did what it could to drive you to extinction.

But I see you're still here...

And frankly, that is one of the things I like about mining and miners.

I've always respected people with grit and determination.

Like the people at Redfern Resources, who just got their federal Environmental Certificate after over a decade of waiting.

Good work Terry!

If I do this job properly, I'm going to be your connection to the provincial government.

I want you to be comfortable calling me or my office at any time.

I'm your advocate in Victoria...your conduit to cabinet... and to the Premier's office.

Let me tell you a little more about who I am.

I am no relation to the former premier, the Honourable Bill Bennett, except for an ideological kinship.

I was born 55 years ago in Campbellford, Ontario.

I spent my youth working as a fishing guide in northern Canada, with one memorable summer working at a small mine 140 miles north of Whitehorse.

I saw my first grizzly out hiking the hills north of Carmacks.

My esteemed job in this mining camp as a 19 year old was to help in the kitchen, clean the bunkhouse and the bathrooms.

Despite that, I remember the excitement of this little underground exploration venture and how much money I was able to save in one summer.

In younger days, I owned fly in fishing lodges in northern Canada, worked on tourism ventures with northern first nations and then at age 39 decided to go back to school and get a law degree.

A few years ago, I was compelled to try and do something about the state of this magnificent province.

I listened to what Gordon Campbell had to say about the future of the province and it inspired me.

One of my sons had already abandoned the Kootenays for Alberta, with the other son looking eastward as well.

I decided I had to try to make a difference.

A good start would be to get elected MLA in my Riding.

Earlier this year, after my second election, Premier Campbell named me Minister Responsible for Mining.

It's a job I'm thrilled to have, for several reasons.

Some of you know, the riding I represent was literally built by miners, and coal mining continues to pump a billion dollars a year into the East Kootenay and BC economies.

2600 people work directly for mines in my riding and thousands more have spin off jobs.

The average mining wage in BC, with benefits, is \$94,000.00.

You can raise a family on that kind of wage -- you can have a good life.

That is one of the main reasons I believe so strongly in mining.

I've lived all my life in rural Canada and I know that just about everyone who lives in the rural parts of this country, lives there by choice.

In my opinion, the rural, small town lifestyle in Canada is the best lifestyle in the world.

But, you have to have a good job to enjoy the rural lifestyle, and that's where mining comes in.

When I was first elected in 2001, I found that, although the Premier, Dick Neufeld and a few of my rural colleagues like Pat Bell knew the value of a healthy mining industry.

However, there were those in Victoria who did not – including some of my own caucus colleagues.

That Christmas, in the interest of getting all 77 of our MLA's thinking about mining, I gave each of them a lump of coal, wrapped in red tissue paper.

After I was named minister in June I went on a walk-about around B.C. and saw first hand just how vital you are to the entire B.C. economy.

I saw the enormous benefits that come from an Eskay Creek and a Kemess.

I saw the potential at Red Chris and Galore Creek.

I've talked to some of the 10,000 plus miners, geologists and truck drivers who put food on the table from good paying mining jobs.

I know what mining contributes to British Columbia and I thank you for it.

Exploration spending this year alone is expected to exceed 150 million dollars.

Five times what it was since 2001.

Mining is now a \$4.5 billion dollar industry in B.C. and still only uses 0.03 percent of BC's land base.

So when I hear that mining is bad for the environment, it's hard to accept that.

As you know, BC has a comprehensive environmental assessment process.

Mines today are developed in conjunction with local people, with First Nations and are developed and operated in a way that we can be proud of.

Mining in BC generates \$4.5 billion in economic activity, using only .03% of our land base.

Eskay Creek generated literally billions of dollars in wealth for the world, from a mine site that is not much bigger than a couple of football fields.

When I was up at Eskay, I met two members of the Tahltan First Nation, working as a heavy duty mechanic and an underground driller.

They are proud of their skills and their work.

BC wants more Eskay Creek Mines and I know you folks do too.

We've made quite a few positive changes to boost mining, since 2001, though I want to say at the outset, we know the job's not done.

The positive changes, combined with your willingness to believe in British Columbia again, have brought tremendous progress.

We've all seen the interest and involvement by the Premier, in both policy decisions and his attendance at Roundup for the past two years.

Two years ago, the Premier directed us to work closely with industry and associations like the Chamber to develop a strategic plan.

The BC Mining Plan was the result of that work.

The Plan, which many of you provided valuable input on, is a vision for a strong, competitive BC mining industry.

The Cornerstones of the Plan are:

1. To ensure that communities and First Nations benefit from mining.

2. Secondly, to protect workers and the environment:
3. Third, to ensure that we are globally competitive.
4. And finally, to make certain you have reliable access to the land.

We are already implementing many of the actions outlined in the plan.

- We provided \$25 million to the Chamber to establish a new centre for Geoscience.
- We invested \$2.1 million to support the Rocks to Riches program.
- Over \$1 million in funding to mine training and education programs.
- We extended the B.C. mining exploration tax credit for a full decade.
- Created a two-zone system for mining.
- We're forging a New Relationship with First Nations
- And we've cut red tape by more than 30 percent!

Mineral Titles Online is something else that we're proud of.

Almost 1.1 million hectares of claims was staked online last year, the most in 13 years, and up 80% from 2001.

As of last month, 3.6 million hectares has been staked online thus far this year....up more than 200% from last year.

The exploration community has been outstanding in helping with the implementation of the Mineral Titles Online project.

And I thank you for that.

So -- with a little help from commodity prices and a lot of help from you, our approach is working.

BC had 470 major exploration projects underway in 2004, up 88% from 2003.

Right now, there are over 20 significant mineral and coal projects in advanced exploration and development, including 14 proposed large mining projects in the environmental assessment process.

The Credit Union in BC predicts mining will have the sharpest real growth of any sector in the province this year.

But make no mistake.

As well as things are going, we all know, BC needs new mines.

And we need them sooner, rather than later.

International demand for commodities is voracious and there are fewer major mines coming on-line today anywhere in the world.

Some of our offshore competitors are not as reliable or as friendly as we thought they once were.

And meantime, China and India are booming.

This is a glorious opportunity for BC.

Imagine the schools and hospitals we could build, if we used even a half percent of our landmass for mining, rather than the .03% we use today.

Now, I also know that we still have challenges here in BC.

During my trip to the northwest I heard the message loud and clear – whether in Terrace, Stewart, Smithers or Iskut.

There needs to be a secure power source for new mines to happen in the NW.

It's my job to advocate for the power line up highway 37.

And to work for the construction of the Omineca-Stewart Resource Road.

I also know that the issues around the federal environmental assessment process and First Nations are challenging.

When I first was appointed minister, I made an effort to meet with as many of you as possible.

I came here to Vancouver and met with the Chamber and the Mining Association, but I also went out and met many of you personally in your offices.

Most of you told me the number one problem is the effort and resources you have to put into working with the federal agencies.

I want you to know that we're working as hard as we can to liaise with the federal agencies, like DFO and Environment.

In the interest of creating more good jobs and tax revenues, we are encouraging them to streamline their processes.

This needs to be one of our highest priorities and it is.

And to be fair, the federal ministers did approve Tulsequah Chief despite pressures to do otherwise. That's a positive sign.

There is also our goal of a "New Relationship" with First Nations, which is imperative for the growth of the mining sector.

We're working together to develop a common framework towards resource development that will benefit First Nations people and the province in general;

The end goal is certainty and prosperity.

You here at the Chamber of Mines have taken a leading role in that regard.

Your new Aboriginal Community Engagement Guidebook is impressive.

I truly believe that the key to success in this area is seeing stronger First Nations relationships as an opportunity, rather than a problem.

Mines like Eskay Creek have proven how a positive relationship with First Nations can enhance world-class success.

So, we're working on the exploration side, we're developing infrastructure and bringing some certainty to the land base.

We're working with our federal colleagues and with First Nations.

Let's think about customers.

Asia Pacific Gateway — a phrase barely used a decade ago — was a key component in Premier Campbell's Throne speech last spring.

We have a golden opportunity to become North America's foremost crossroads to the Asia-Pacific.

The demand for BC coal and metals from Asia is so great; we can't meet their needs.

We recognize the potential and will continue to work with you and with our Asian trading partners.

This is just the beginning of what we can accomplish with Asia.

Another indication of just how far we've come in B.C. is right here in this room.

The B.C. and Yukon Chamber of Mines now has around 3,000 members.

That's double the membership of just five years ago.

Congratulations on that tremendous growth.

Together, the industry and government is revitalizing an industry that this province was built around.

It wasn't that long ago when tough-as-nails old miners hauled sacks of ore off mountains all over B.C. to waiting paddle wheelers.

Mining opened up this province. Its part of our heritage and we should be proud of it.

The 1990's were an insult to that hard work and dedication.

But the bad old days when you were told you should apologize for being in mining, are over.

Our government understands full well how much mining contributes to things like healthcare, education and everything else that makes this province the best place on earth to live.

Under Premier Campbell's leadership, we're rolling up our sleeves and working on your behalf.

We're going to keep doing that...because we know mining is a critical engine of our economy.

We'll promote new mine development... as well as worker safety and environmental responsibility.

We'll encourage the right business climate to attract investment,

We'll help you increase mineral exploration and mining activity,

We'll help you create jobs and opportunities for communities and First Nations.

Those of you who know me, know I mean what I say.

As your minister, I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you this morning.