



Speech from the Throne

The Honourable Iona Campagnolo

Lieutenant-Governor

————— *at the* —————

Opening of the Sixth Session,

Thirty-Seventh Parliament

————— *of the* —————

Province of British Columbia

February 8, 2005



Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, British Columbians

It is a privilege to once again address you at the beginning of this new session of the Parliament of British Columbia.

Since this Assembly last convened we lost many honoured British Columbians who we pay tribute to today.

Former member of this Assembly Daisy Webster, former Member of Parliament Dave Worthy, B.C.'s Provincial Archivist John Bovey, entrepreneurs Bob Scarabelli, Joseph Capozzi, and Lucille Johnstone.

We join the Nisga'a people in mourning the loss of their first ambassador of the Nisga'a Lisims Government, Rod Robinson, the Hereditary Chief of the Eagle Clan.

We lost people whose spirit and zest for life contributed so much to our diverse communities: Dr. Paul Lin, Amrit Kaur Dhaliwal, Domenic Mobilio, and David Grierson.

We lost Toni Onley who captured the stunning beauty of our province in his art, and Pierre Berton, a Canadian legend who brought to life the history of our land and our people.

We were reminded about the sacrifices of our volunteers and our law enforcement community with the tragic loss of Auxiliary Constable Glen Evely, who died in the line of duty.

And our prayers, condolences and commitment to assistance go out to the families and survivors of the terrible Tsunami in South Asia that has taken such a

heavy toll in human life and property. That event, like the tragic mud slide in North Vancouver, has reminded us all of the tenuous nature of life, the sheer power of nature, and the need to prepare as best we can to avoid such loss of life in future.

At the same time, it has shown British Columbians' and Canadians' generosity of spirit and united the world in common cause and empathy.

***A TRIBUTE TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY
ON ELECTORAL REFORM***

This Session marks an important milestone in the history of our province and our nation.

For the first time in Canada, all members enter this Session knowing the date of the next general election and the date that this Assembly will be dissolved. On April 19th, the writ will be dropped and an election will be held on May 17th, as specified under the Constitution (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act. That bold stroke in parliamentary reform, passed in August 2001, is an achievement for which all members should be rightly proud.

Nearly two years ago, this Legislature also unanimously approved the terms of reference, Chair, and referendum process for the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. It was a world first, driven from start to finish not by politicians or government, but by citizens drawn from all walks of life.

On behalf of all British Columbians, your government extends its warmest thanks to the Assembly's Chair, Mr. Jack Blaney, and to Mr. Gordon Gibson for his outstanding founding report. A special thanks is owed to all 161 members of the Citizens' Assembly, and to their staff, researchers and administrators. Their selfless commitment, dedication, and contributions through 11 months of deliberations and 50 public hearings were an inspiration to us all.

Now that the Assembly's work is done, it will be up to all British Columbians to answer its draft referendum question on May 17th:

Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform? Yes/No.

Your government will remain neutral on that question. Yet it is firmly committed to acting on the referendum outcome.

This is British Columbians' chance to make an informed decision on how best to elect their MLAs and choose the electoral system that best represents their needs and interests.

**TOWARDS A GOLDEN DECADE
FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA**

As we enter this Parliament's final legislative session, we look forward to what lies ahead.

This government's path is clear. Although its options have multiplied as British Columbia's fortunes have improved, its chosen route and destination remain the same.

More jobs. More investment. New hope. New prosperity.

Lower taxes. Balanced budgets. Increased revenues.
Better services for families and people in need.

Better health and education. A cleaner environment.
Safer streets and schools.

New confidence. New optimism. A new world of possibilities.

This has been your government's roadmap to prosperity and it remains its guiding vision. This was the mandate your government was elected to fulfill and has acted to deliver.

It is the route that will lead our province forward to higher ground and higher purpose. It is the welcome ground won through three years of hard work. Together, British Columbians have weathered many trials and unimagined obstacles, to emerge stronger, healthier and empowered by their progress.

Today, we are entering a golden decade for British Columbia. The future British Columbians have worked so hard to create is now within our grasp.

Our province is leading the nation in job creation. Unemployment is at its lowest level since 1981. Our economy is growing in every region and business is

booming. People are moving back to B.C. Families are coming home.

There is new optimism in our forests, new certainty on our land base, and new hope for First Nations and resource communities. There is new labour stability, with 68 public sector agreements, and the fewest number of strikes and lockouts in over 30 years.

Government is again living within its means with balanced budgets and, including the forecast allowance, a record surplus. Our stronger economy is generating new revenues for sustainable improvements to social services. For the first time in many years, we will start paying down operating debt in a real and sustainable way.

There is new wealth to sustain expanded services for those most vulnerable in our society. There are new means to pursue people's goals.

Better access to education and high quality health care. Better support services for women, children, seniors and people in need. More jobs and new opportunities for families, First Nations, and small businesses across B.C. Higher take-home pay and a better standard of living.

That is the power of a strong economy. That is the point of responsible fiscal management.

And that has always been the object of your government's vision for a brighter future.

We do live in the best place on Earth. The promise of the next decade is to make it ever-better for all British Columbians. It is the capacity to lift our entire society higher.

It is the potential to open new gateways of knowledge, trade and culture, by opening our minds, hearts and province to the world. It is the prospect of giving our children a better chance to pursue their dreams, by leaving them a brighter future – and not our debt. This is your government's mission.

It means setting our sights high and building on the reforms and investments made, to make British Columbia the true Canadian leader in economic, environmental and social development. It means looking beyond B.C. to the new world of global commerce that holds our future in the balance.

We are uniquely positioned as Canada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific. We have a golden opportunity to open that gateway wide, and to make that competitive advantage British Columbia's competitive edge. We have a golden opportunity to forge new relationships. To open up our ports, airports, roads, and rail links – and open our province to new trade, investment, visitors and cultures.

This is the age of global connection, global communication and global partnerships. The new explorers are those who seek new knowledge and push through to new frontiers of cultural understanding. We are uniquely well positioned to take that next step and become the continent's foremost Pacific crossroads.

Now that we have rebuilt within our province, we are ready to take our products to the world. It is time to tell the world about all we have achieved and all we have to offer – not just economically, but culturally, environmentally and socially as British Columbians.

It is time to welcome the world and understand it better, through new gateways to trade, new cultural exchange, new relationships, and new partnerships in education.

This is the path your government will pursue.

It is time to move B.C. beyond recovery, to a new age of discovery, growth and opportunity that is far-reaching, forward looking, and truly global.

GREAT GOALS FOR A GOLDEN DECADE

As your government reaches higher, it will set new goals to guide its progress. Its over-riding objective is to help British Columbia realize its full potential as the best place on Earth to raise a family; to live and play; to work, invest and get ahead.

To that end, your government has identified five great goals for the decade ahead.

1. To make B.C. the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.
2. To lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness.
3. To build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors.

4. To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none.
5. To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

These are far reaching aspirations that will challenge us all. They explicitly recognize and embrace British Columbia's role as a Canadian leader.

It is only by setting our sights high and pushing ourselves to new heights that we can test the limits of our potential.

Experience suggests that when British Columbians set their minds to a task, they exceed expectations. That was how we won the right to host the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. We worked for it. Focused on it. And won our Olympic dream together.

If we work together, with determination and focus, we will not just reach our goals; we will surpass them. That is the story of British Columbia.

In less than four years, we have re-established ourselves as a national force, as a job leader, and as a leader in health reform and educational advancement. We are leading the nation in investor confidence and small business optimism.

In short, the prosperity plan is now well underway, and it is working. Your government will build upon that plan with targeted investments and policies to benefit B.C. families.

***THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH
TO RAISE A FAMILY***

The family is the fundamental building block of any community or society. Key to any family's well-being is the means to support and provide for its members – especially children.

Your government believes that it should take no more than is necessary from families' paycheques to provide the services families want and need. That is why it reduced income taxes for all B.C. families by an average of 25 per cent, and by 28 per cent for those earning less than \$30,000 a year.

Next week, your government will build on that success.

***The Best In Childcare And Early Childhood
Development***

The future of any province and any family is its children.

This year, your government will do more to give B.C.'s youngest citizens a healthy start in life. The best early childhood development always starts at home, with loving families. But increasingly it is also happening in daycare centres and in other learning environments.

Your government has made 32,000 more daycare spaces eligible for funding, and 10,000 more children eligible for daycare subsidies. Funding for childcare subsidies and capital improvements is now higher than ever. Over the next five years, working with the federal government, an additional \$650 million is planned to be made available

to young families all over the province to assist with child care.

Early childhood development programs will also be strengthened. We know that the earlier we can identify physical and emotional problems in infants and toddlers, the faster and more effectively we can deal with them. New resources will be added to do just that. Over \$76 million will be invested through 2007 to expand diagnostic screening services to every child in hearing, sight and dental testing. Additional funding will also be targeted to encourage healthy pregnancies, and to help prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Your government wants all children to have the brightest possible future. No public service is more important in that regard than public education. The new Ready, Set, Learn program will give parents new tools to prepare their pre-schoolers for public school.

The Best In Education

Your government is committed to making B.C. the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.

Its entire education strategy has been aimed at putting students first, starting by restoring education as an essential service. Many changes have been made to give school boards greater autonomy, flexibility, and certainty, to help them direct resources where they are needed most for students.

There is greater accountability for school boards' spending, and for their schools' outcomes in student

achievement. Parents and students now have greater choice in schooling and new opportunities for involvement in school planning and volunteerism.

All school districts have received substantial funding increases, in spite of declining student enrolments. In the coming year, block grants to school boards will increase by \$150 million. That represents a total increase in school operating funding of \$305 million since 2000/01 despite a drop in enrolment of over 29,000 students. It equals an increase in per student funding of \$863.

In addition, school boards have received \$68 million for wage costs, and \$138 million in one-time grants since 2002.

Your government believes that every child deserves to have adequate school-based library services and textbooks. Every school will be required to provide library services for its students. Your government will require that every school in B.C. meet appropriate standards for learning resources.

Last fall, it provided school districts with an extra \$10 million for new textbooks – enough to buy 285,000 textbooks. The extra funding in this year's block grant is enough to eliminate textbook shortages.

All districts will be required to report annually on how they are providing their students and their schools with adequate library services and learning resources. The increased funding includes an estimated \$28 million extra to improve education for students with special

needs. It will also help school districts make any necessary adjustments to class size and composition.

We know that arts and music programs are an enormous benefit to student learning and achievement. The new funding will also support that priority. Your government will work with school boards to ensure a comprehensive arts and music curriculum is available and delivered throughout the public school system in B.C.

Other steps will be taken to promote physical education and active lifestyles. Your government will extend the successful Action Schools program to every school in B.C. for grades K to 9. It will eliminate junk food in all schools within the next four years.

And it will extend the Roots of Empathy program, which teaches children compassion and understanding, and has proven effective in helping reduce aggressive behaviour, to every school in the province.

At the same time, your government will work with schools to increase student safety. Safety will be improved by your government's \$1.5 billion plan to complete all needed seismic upgrades within the next 15 years.

New steps will be taken to ensure that our schools are fully utilized for the benefit of their communities. With declining student enrolments, school boards have often found that there simply is not the student population needed to warrant keeping many schools open.

This is not a function of under funding; it results from shifting demographics and population patterns. Your government will work with community school advocates and others to examine new uses for those under-utilized school spaces across B.C.

They might be suitable for early childhood development centres, parent centres, community libraries, seniors' centres, daycares, music rooms, theatres, diagnostic centres, and meeting rooms.

The opportunity is to define modern uses that revitalize schools as centres of learning in our neighbourhoods and towns, as centres for community activity, and child development.

As we explore new ways to best utilize our schools, new capital improvements will be made. By 2007/08, capital funding for B.C. schools will have increased \$1.8 billion since 2001. We will have built or approved 29 new schools in British Columbia, and expanded, renovated, replaced or seismically upgraded 245 schools.

The Best In Literacy

The Province's new literacy strategy is also central to our future. It is aimed at promoting improvements in reading, writing, numeracy and computer literacy for all British Columbians.

A new Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy is assessing literacy challenges, identifying urgent needs, and developing an action plan to help B.C. meet its literacy goals. The strategy includes an extra \$12 million to

strengthen community libraries and improve access to library resources for citizens across the province.

There is a new \$5 million literacy innovation program to promote literacy in our schools. Provincial funding has been doubled for the adult cost-shared literacy program. A new \$5 million Literacy Now initiative is supporting community-based literacy programs, working closely with volunteer and non-profit organizations.

And this year, your government will once again match any donations raised by the successful Raise-a-Reader program on a dollar-for-dollar basis. All of this will move our province closer to its great goal in education and literacy.

The Best In Higher Learning

By increasing access to higher learning, we will also take our advanced education system to a higher level.

Your government has embarked on the largest expansion of post-secondary seats in 40 years. Last year's Throne Speech announced a plan to create 25,000 new student spaces across B.C. by 2010. Those spaces are in addition to the 6,000 new spaces created in the previous three years. Over the next three years alone, \$800 million will be invested on capital improvements.

This Session, new legislation will be introduced to formalize the new Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, which joins UBC Okanagan as B.C.'s newest universities.

To fully support the new student spaces, your government will further increase funding for advanced education by \$132 million over the next three years. Together with the funding increase announced last year, the operating budget for advanced education will be \$195 million higher by 2007 than it was in 2004.

This new funding will provide new capacity to moderate rising tuitions. Your government recognizes that rising tuition costs are a concern to many B.C. families. Now that our tuition rates are again comparable to those in other provinces, your government will act to limit future tuition increases to the rate of inflation, effective this September. Legislation giving effect to that measure will be introduced later this year.

Moreover, new steps will be taken later this year to improve student financial assistance. These measures will build upon previous improvements to existing student aid programs.

The new student financial assistance program allows eligible students to earn almost three times more money without penalty than they could before. The new loan reduction program now allows a portion of student loan costs to be forgiven for eligible students who successfully complete their studies.

Other steps will be taken this year to deliver new access to higher learning, closer to home.

The new seats and programs already announced will help meet skills shortages in key demand areas. The

new industry training model is also helping to more rapidly address workforce needs and give more workers access to trades training.

Yet we know even these measures will not be sufficient to offset the growing needs and opportunities in sectors like construction, oil and gas, hospitality, and others. More will be done to make the most of growing job opportunities for our citizens.

A major initiative will be undertaken to further increase access to skills training and apprenticeships. Your government will work with the federal government to enhance and speed up credentialing for newcomers to Canada in trades and the professions.

Further steps will also be taken to expand access to advanced education and research activities in our regions. Your government will explore the potential for creating new special purpose universities.

In expanding our range of education opportunities, we must also look to expanding our reach and knowledge beyond our borders. Your government will build its new Asia-Pacific gateway strategy in the marriage of advanced education and trade.

It will work to establish British Columbia as the new global home for the World Trade University, to be located in Chilliwack. The WTU is a United Nations global partnership mechanism.

It will offer graduate level programs in trade-related fields and executive development programs targeted

to working international executives. It will host international trade conferences and events, including the potential for British Columbia to host World Trade Forum events.

The WTU will firmly establish British Columbia's role as Canada's Gateway to the Asia-Pacific, and as a true global leader in trade relations.

Your government will bring together all our institutions of advanced learning to pursue other initiatives to help British Columbians learn more about other nations and cultures. A new One World Scholarship fund will be launched to help B.C. students earn their degrees and diplomas in other non-G8 countries. This will create new avenues to understanding and new ambassadors for British Columbia abroad.

The Best System Of Support For Persons With Disabilities, Special Needs, Children At Risk, And Seniors

Our stronger economy has generated new revenues to help advance another of your government's great goals for B.C. families.

Financial prudence and new fiscal capacity will allow us to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk, and seniors. It allowed your government to announce the single largest rate increase in history for persons with disabilities on income assistance.

It allowed combined funding for autism and early childhood development to almost triple since 2001. It allowed funding for social housing to increase by 38 per cent since your government came to office.

This year, more will be done to improve our social safety network for society's most vulnerable. The amount that persons with disabilities can earn without penalty while on income assistance has already been doubled. Those earnings exemptions will be further increased next year.

Efforts to combat violence against women will be stepped up with over \$37 million in new funding over the next three years. That new funding will ensure that women and children escaping violent and abusive relationships have 24/7 access to safe housing.

The government will increase resources for counseling services and outreach activities tailored to the special needs of seniors, multicultural communities, Aboriginal women, and people with disabilities.

The Premier's Task Force on Homelessness will continue to develop new strategies to tackle the challenges of homelessness, addictions and mental illness in our communities. New steps will be taken to improve legal aid, family law, and addictions services.

Over the next three years, funding for adult community living services will be increased by \$91 million. There will be new respite support for families caring for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

An additional \$37 million will be invested over three years in programs related to children in the care of government.

As our population ages, seniors' needs will continue to grow. Seniors are living longer and healthier lives – and that is great news. Yet this also presents new challenges for our society.

To that end, a new Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues will be established. It will include representatives from key seniors' organizations, every region, and our diverse multicultural communities.

The Council will identify pressing needs and opportunities to advance your government's great goal in respect of seniors' services. It will examine how to improve the full spectrum of seniors' housing options and homecare.

It will consider the issue of mandatory retirement, to engage seniors and all citizens in a fruitful dialogue on what changes, if any, should be made to improve seniors' independence and quality of living in the modern world. It will examine the changing service needs of a healthier, aging population and recommend comprehensive plans for reform.

Safer Streets And Schools

Safer communities are central to your government's plan to make B.C. the best place to raise a family. Your government is committed to fighting crime with new resources.

Today 100 per cent of all traffic fine revenues are returned to B.C.'s municipalities for crime prevention and policing. As well your government will commit \$122 million in new funding for 215 new police officers over the next three years.

That will improve provincial policing in rural and smaller communities, including First Nation communities. It will help crack down on cyber crimes and better protect children from sexual predators.

New integrated approaches to policing, homicide investigation, and criminal prosecution will all take law enforcement to a higher level. The new Amber Alert system will help solve child abductions.

New measures to reduce impaired driving and to discourage aggressive panhandling and unsafe activities will improve safety on our streets and highways. New policing and enforcement powers will improve safety for seniors, women, and youth along the SkyTrain corridor. New legislation will be tabled this Session to ensure criminals do not profit from their crimes.

And your government will engage all levels of government in a common review of steps that might be taken within their respective jurisdictions to take public safety to a higher level. A special Provincial Congress on Public Safety will be convened later this year. It will look across the board at crime prevention, treatment, legislation and by-laws, policing, prosecution, courts, and corrections.

The federal Criminal Code is applied by our police and courts at all levels. It is time to take a hard look at the sentencing options and guidance given to our courts by legislators in problem areas like violent crime, organized crime, drug trafficking, marijuana grow ops, and car theft.

***THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH
TO LIVE AND PLAY***

Nothing is more important to our quality of living and lifestyle in British Columbia than our family's personal health.

Together, we can achieve another great goal over the next decade: to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness.

***Leading The Way In Healthy Living And Physical
Fitness***

The pressures on our health care system are rapidly outstripping our economy's ability to generate new revenues needed to pay for growing service demands. Our aging population, new technologies, expanded health services, soaring drug costs, and higher labour costs all add new cost pressures every year.

That is why your government acted to revitalize our health care system with significant reforms and new infusions of funding. This renewal process has not been easy, but it is necessary.

It has been guided at every step by the goal of putting more of each health dollar to improve patient care.

Health care spending has increased by \$2.4 billion since the year 2000. Over the next three years, it will go up by another \$1.5 billion.

New demands are still stretching resources in unprecedented ways. Health funding has outpaced the rate of revenue growth in that period. This year health spending will consume 44 per cent of all government operating expenditures, excluding interest on debt.

Although there is clearly more that must be done to improve health care in British Columbia, we are making progress. Our citizens have the longest life expectancy in Canada. We have the most universal prescription drug program in the country.

British Columbia now leads the nation in cancer treatment and survival rates. We have the lowest smoking rate in Canada and the lowest smoking prevalence among teens. British Columbia has Canada's lowest median wait times for access to diagnostic tests and specialists.

And our province attracted more doctors from other parts of Canada in 2003 than any other province. Your government has nearly doubled the number of doctors in training, with new medical schools at UNBC in Prince George and UVic in Victoria, and a new Life Sciences Centre at UBC.

This represents the first increase in medical training seats since 1980 – a quarter century ago. It means that by 2008, there will be 896 doctors in training at any given time in B.C., up from 488.

Your government's nursing strategy is similarly paying off, with 600 more nurses at work and another 2,134 new nurse training spaces added since 2001. That represents a 50 per cent increase in total nurses in training in British Columbia. That is 25 times greater than the nurse training spaces added throughout the entire 1990's.

This year, B.C.'s first-ever class of nurse practitioners will graduate from UBC and UVic, and the first class of nurse practitioners will begin at UNBC.

Your government has increased the number of MRI machines by 75 per cent, increased access to renal dialysis by 40 per cent, and added seven new CT scanners.

By any measure, this is progress.

There will be 5,000 new beds for seniors across the spectrum of assisted living, residential care and independent housing. These are the choices that seniors want.

There are new cardiac defibrillators in every ambulance in B.C. and there is new training for paramedics.

Our Fair Pharmacare system is now the envy of Canada and the model other provinces aspire to emulate. It has reduced costs for 280,000 British Columbian seniors and families on lower incomes. Today 82 per cent of all citizens pay the same or less than they did in 2001. Your government will continue to drive the establishment of a national pharmacare strategy.

Although MSP premiums increased to help pay for increases in doctors' fees and salaries, today 230,000 citizens on lower incomes pay lower premiums than they did in 2001.

It takes time but, in every area of health care, progress is apparent. Challenges remain but patient satisfaction surveys confirm that we are making progress.

The fact is, thanks to thousands of health professionals across the province, we do have a great health care system in British Columbia that is getting better every day.

The opportunity is to take our health services to a higher level.

There is new hope.

The recent federal/provincial health accord will pump an extra \$5.4 billion into B.C.'s health care system over the next 10 years. It will support major improvements in home care for seniors and Aboriginal health care, starting this year.

It will help reduce wait times in key areas like cardiac treatment, diagnostic imaging, joint replacements, and sight restoration. It will increase investments in telehealth for rural and remote communities and in new medical equipment and technologies.

All of these measures will provide better health care to our citizens. As your government continues to improve patient care, it will devote new energy and new resources to prevention. It will explore new ways

to integrate alternative health care options into our mainstream health care system.

Advancements in health research are rapidly making British Columbia a world leader in disease and illness prevention.

Genome BC has led the world in genome mapping and cancer research. The Michael Smith Foundation has been a major force in health research. Your government will budget \$100 million in 2007 to support the Michael Smith Foundation's amazing work.

Researchers at the Michael Smith Genome Sciences Centre were the first in the world to crack the genetic code of SARS, only weeks after it first struck. Working with experts around the world, British Columbia's SARS Accelerated Vaccine Initiative research team led the world in developing four potential vaccines to that virus. Two of those may soon be available for human clinical trials.

The B.C. Centre for Disease Control is already the best in Canada. We have a golden opportunity to make it the best in the Pacific world – and we will. New measures will be announced to expand that Centre to become the Pacific Centre for Disease Control.

Working with governments and institutions in Singapore, China, and India we will forge new partnerships and foster new advancements in disease prevention that will further consolidate B.C.'s reputation as a global leader in public health and research.

All of these measures will improve preventative health care and treatment for our citizens. Over the last three years, your government has more than doubled funding for vaccinations. It has expanded childhood immunization programs and influenza vaccination programs to help infants, their parents, and seniors.

This year, more will be done to support those prevention and wellness programs, and to increase Avian flu awareness and prevention measures.

The best way to improve health outcomes is to help our citizens stay healthy. There is no place better on Earth to lead a healthy lifestyle than in British Columbia.

Without a doubt, we can achieve the great goal of leading North America in healthy living and physical fitness. Your government will establish a sweeping new health and fitness program for all British Columbians.

A major new initiative called “Act Now” will soon be launched in partnership with others. Act Now will be the most comprehensive health promotion program of its kind in North America.

Your government will act now to increase by 20 per cent the proportion of British Columbians who are physically active. It will act now to reduce by 20 per cent the proportion of British Columbians who are obese or overweight.

It will act now to reduce by another 10 per cent the prevalence of tobacco use. And it will act now to increase by 20 per cent the proportion of British Columbians who eat the recommended daily level of fruit and vegetables.

Through these measures, by 2010, B.C. will become the healthiest jurisdiction to ever host the Olympics.

Your government will explore the introduction of personal health guides in B.C., an exciting innovation currently being pioneered in the United Kingdom.

Through that initiative, all citizens will work with their family doctors, nurse practitioners, community nutritionists, and other members of the health care team to develop personally tailored health plans. Those plans will aim at setting achievable personal health goals that help individuals' measure their progress, throughout their lives.

Leading The World In Sustainable Environmental Management

A healthy environment is also critical to a healthy lifestyle.

Our stunning natural scenery, diversity of species, wildlife and ecosystems, and our clean air and water, all help define our province to the world.

We can lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none.

That is yet another of your government's great goals for the golden decade ahead.

Already, much has been done to meet that goal. Your government has acted to acquire and preserve Burns Bog and the Codd Wetlands for future generations.

It established 37 new Class A parks and one ecological reserve, and expanded 34 existing parks and four ecological reserves. It passed legislation to protect species at risk. It modernized environmental protection legislation and acted to clean up contaminated sites.

The Habitat Conservation Trust Fund is being strengthened with a \$6.5 million donation to support parkland acquisitions and conservation activities. While the challenge of land use planning remains, final agreements are on the horizon and drawing near.

The opportunity for the next decade is to improve the management of parks and protected areas, and to improve access for public use and enjoyment. It is to improve wildlife management and conservation practices in general.

To that end, your government will invest \$9 million over the next three years to establish a B.C. Conservation Corps. The Corps will provide new employment opportunities for B.C.'s students and graduates to work in our parks and wilderness as a new generation of conservationists.

That initiative will be complemented with a \$7.5 million increase over the next three years to add up to 50 new Conservation Officers and Park Rangers.

Major new steps will be taken to improve water and fisheries management. Our water resources are the well-springs that sustain our province and its people. They are the lifeblood of our fisheries.

New resources will be added to help implement the \$16 million Drinking Water Action Plan and the \$120 million B.C. Community Water Improvement Program. Investments will be made to strengthen the 184 water quality monitoring units now situated across B.C.

The new Pacific Salmon Forum will provide an independent voice to help us safeguard our precious wild salmon resource and improve our aquaculture industry. The Living Rivers Strategy will be expanded this year and new investments will be made in salmonoid enhancement and fish habitats.

Water plans will be advanced in communities across B.C. to implement your government's new Drought Management Action Plan.

As water stewardship is strengthened, air shed management will also be improved. Your government's new clean energy strategy will help tremendously in that regard. Your government will continue to fight for cleaner air in the Fraser Valley, by maintaining its opposition to the proposed Sumas 2 power project.

New steps will be taken this year to promote alternative energy in wind, tidal, solar and run-of-the-river power projects. An Alternative Energy and Power Task Force will be established and will report directly to the Executive Council.

The new RAV rapid transit line will vastly reduce vehicle emissions in the Lower Mainland. And new air shed management plans will be supported with

improvements to the 146 air quality monitoring units across B.C.

All of these measures will apply sound science to our environmental management and raise it to a higher level in British Columbia.

The Best Place To Play

As we enhance “SuperNatural” British Columbia, we also advance our growing reputation as the best place on Earth to visit and play.

Our parks and resorts are a huge and growing draw for visitors the world over. Eco-tourism, marine tourism and agri-tourism are all thriving, using nature as a showcase.

Our destination resort tourism industry is taking these competitive advantages to a higher level, with over \$4 billion worth of projects now on the drawing board or underway.

Tourism is a cornerstone of your government’s Asia-Pacific Gateway strategy to create new jobs, investment and opportunity in every region.

Canada’s approved destination status with China calls out for the immediate development of tourism products that meet the needs of Chinese tourists. One hundred million travelers are expected from China world wide by 2020. British Columbia will be prepared to welcome them.

The 2010 Olympics will open that gateway to literally billions of visitors and viewers around the world. Your government is making the most of that opportunity.

It is doubling the funding for Tourism B.C. and giving the Union of B.C. Municipalities a further \$25 million to draw new tourists to every region of our province. It is creating new Circle Routes and a Spirit of 2010 Trail system to provide visitors with additional opportunities to see more communities and all the regions of the province.

The goal is to double tourism revenues within a decade. New steps will be taken this month to benefit regional tourism across our province and to showcase the best of B.C. to the world.

***THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH
TO WORK, INVEST AND GET AHEAD***

Leading The Nation In Job Creation

The improving standard of living and growing opportunities mentioned today are possible through the power of a strong economy.

Virtually every sector is now buoyed by higher commodity prices, low interest rates, new confidence and new competitiveness.

The government's goal is to build on that confidence and creativity as we create more jobs per capita than any other province in Canada over the next decade.

Since December 2001, British Columbia has led the nation in job creation, with nearly 200,000 new jobs. 97 per cent of those jobs are full-time jobs. Many are in high-paying sectors like forestry, energy, mining and technology.

Forestry, mining, and small business are back. Energy, construction and transportation are booming. Tourism, technology, manufacturing, retail, and agriculture are on the rise. Our film industry has new cause for hope. Our biotechnology industry offers tremendous promise.

Your government will undertake further action to make the most of the opportunity inherent in the challenges caused by the mountain pine beetle infestation.

New measures will be taken to help communities and families in the areas affected to better plan and cope with the long-term implications of the pine beetle problem.

The higher Canadian dollar is challenging many of our core industries, from pulp and paper to lumber from tourism to trade. For decades, our industries have enjoyed a major competitive advantage due to our discounted Canadian dollar. That advantage is rapidly waning.

It can only be offset with greater productivity, more competitiveness, and new customers the world over. Workers and employers alike will be challenged to recognize this growing reality and respond accordingly.

To succeed in a world where our dollar is near or at par with the American dollar, our industries will need new flexibility, new investment, new business models, and new partnerships with their workers.

Your government will act this year to help lead that discourse. It will initiate a comprehensive review of B.C.'s competitiveness in every sector. It will work with other governments and industrial sectors to plot a course for the next 10 years.

Together, we will pinpoint the barriers to growth and identify solutions to overcome them. We will learn what government can do and what the private sector must do to reach its potential. This will be done on both a sectoral and regional basis, to identify our competitive needs and opportunities in the golden decade ahead.

A B.C. Competition Council will be formed to help steer this initiative and provide advice. Representatives from organized labour will be invited to serve on this Council and to work with employers, academics and regional representatives to help improve each sector's ability to compete.

At the same time, your government will lead new efforts to promote British Columbia's industries to the world. Just as we must lead the Asia-Pacific to Canada, so must we lead Canada to the Asia-Pacific. It is the gateway to tomorrow.

Maximizing this advantage will be a central part of your government's economic strategy and a crucial part of

Canada's future economic growth. Initiatives previously noted in health research, education, advanced education and trade relations will all play a pivotal role.

New relationships, agreements, and partnerships with First Nations are also opening new gateways to growth in their communities and new avenues for investment.

Yet more will be done to make the most of this strategic opportunity to open up our Pacific gateway to the world. Your government will take international marketing efforts to a higher level.

It will bring all sectors of our economy together in an effort to develop a common "brand" for British Columbia, Canada in global markets.

Your government will build on its successful trips to India, Japan, China and other emerging markets. It will build on the Dream Home China project, and pursue new gateways to growth for B.C. wood products throughout the Asia-Pacific.

Working with Canada, it will establish a network of B.C. Trade and Cultural centres in key international markets. This initiative will be led by a new Asia-Pacific Trade Council that will help advise your government on where and how to best target available resources.

Your government's transportation plan and ports strategy will also be central to its Pacific Gateway initiative. We have a golden opportunity to finally open up the Port of Prince Rupert, expand the Port of Vancouver, and improve cruise ship facilities all along our coast.

We have a golden opportunity to open up our gateways by rail and road, working with Canada and the United States to also better secure our continental perimeter.

As we look out to other countries and cultures, we will also look within our province to the many cultures that have made us who we are as British Columbians. Our heritage, diversity and inclusive society is not just a source of provincial pride – it is a strategic asset that must be maximized.

There is no place on Earth with the diversity and wealth of First Nations cultures that we have in British Columbia.

There is no place on Earth that sets a better example for the world of how citizens from all countries can come together and forge a new culture that is rooted in diversity, mutual trust, respect and celebration.

As Canadians, we are a model of multiculturalism.

Yet as British Columbians, the opportunity is ours to take that reality to a higher level.

We can do more to increase our understanding of each other at the most fundamental level – language. Your government will increase its support for ESL programs in coming years.

It will do more to promote Aboriginal languages and learning in Punjabi, Mandarin and other languages of the Asia-Pacific. New initiatives will be launched to make more services and resources available in other languages.

New investments and programs will be launched to support and celebrate our diverse heritage in music, art, culture and sport. New initiatives to encourage support for arts and creative endeavours will build on recent investments to prepare our province for the Cultural Olympiad in 2010.

CONCLUSION

Through all of these measures, we will build a future worthy of our past.

We will realize our great goals and our true potential as the best place on Earth to raise a family; to live and play; to work, invest, and get ahead.

We will act today to welcome the world to British Columbia. We will act today to reach far beyond our borders, to open up our province and proclaim its place as a global leader at home and abroad.

The 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics will help connect us all within our province and to other nations around the world. It has helped launch us forward into a decade of unsurpassed promise.

The spirit of 2010 is the spirit of British Columbia.

It is the spirit of global harmony, and pride of place and heritage.

It is the spirit of aspiration and human endeavor.

It is the spirit of achievement and possibility that now burns bright within our province and will light the golden decade ahead.

Look ahead, to 2010 and beyond, to the province we will build together.

Look ahead, to a British Columbia that offers the best in education and literacy, healthy living and physical fitness, and support services for those in need.

Look ahead to a province that is leading the way in environmental stewardship and job creation. To a new British Columbia that is renowned as a centre of research, learning, trade, and culture.

The time is here for us to reach higher and push open the gateways to opportunity that await our next generation. The time has come for us to move boldly forward to test the limits of our potential.

The key to that potential has never rested with government. It lies in the hearts and minds of individual citizens bold enough to pursue new answers to meet the needs of a changing world.

It is the strength of the people that will fulfill the spirit and promise of British Columbia.

It is our spirit of adventure, discovery, drive, and determination that has always marked our progress throughout our proud history. The way forward is the road we are traveling.

Today we stand on the threshold of B.C.'s golden decade. A decade of boundless choice and unbridled potential, limited only by our will and imagination.

This is the decade that will determine the possibilities that our children will inherit in years to come.

Let us seize this moment to dare, to dream, and to venture forth – for our children and our province.

Thank you.