

Premier Gordon Campbell
Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre Expansion Announcement
Dec. 4, 2002

Check Against Delivery

Thank you very much, Prime Minister: bienvenue à Vancouver et Colombie Britannique.

I would like to take a moment to say thank you to a number of people because, as the Prime Minister pointed out, this has been a project that was built from the ground floor up.

It was built because of the energy and the commitment of a number of citizens in this city who saw potential and decided to reach for it in spite of the hurdles that they might encounter.

We forget sometimes how long these projects take to come together. The suggestion of an expansion was made in 1996. It's taken some time, some effort, some work and some leadership to get us to this exceptional day.

I want to thank you particularly, Prime Minister, for your personal involvement in this – for your commitment to the economic development of our province and to building a true partnership between British Columbia and Canada, because everyone benefits when we work together.

I also want to give a special thank you to (federal Minister of Natural Resources and Vancouver South-Burnaby MP) Herb Dhaliwal. I now know how to get things done: Herb will announce them, and we'll work on the details later. It's also a pleasure to have (Secretary of State for Western Economic Diversification and Vancouver Quadra MP) Stephen Owen here with us today, who has been actively involved in making sure that we work in a true Canada/British Columbia partnership to meet the needs of all of our citizens.

I know you would be the first to recognize the efforts of Nancy Stibbard, who is the ex-president of the expansion task force. Nancy, thank you very much for being here and for the work you did to help us get here.

I want to thank Steve Darling, the chair of Tourism Vancouver; Rick Antonson, the CEO of Tourism Vancouver; and Barb Maples, the general manager for the Vancouver Convention Centre.

It's because of the excellence that we present to our customers when they come to this community that we have the potential to build even greater economic strength in British Columbia and in Canada and in Vancouver.

This is the first time I've been able to be at a public gathering with my long-lost brother Larry. Larry and I are like members of any clan: sometimes we fight and sometimes we get along, but most of the time we do what's right. I'm really pleased that you're here with us today too, Larry – thank you very much for coming.

Let me just say, when I had been mayor for just three days, I wasn't able to deliver a \$495-million project to the city! I don't know how you've done it, but you and Herb can get together and tell me how it will work.

Tourism is a very important part of our economy in British Columbia and in the Lower Mainland. Our convention centre here alone generates \$250 million of economic activity every single year. Three hundred and fifty events – 650,000 delegates – come here to Canada Place.

But for 60 per cent of all international travellers who come through the Lower Mainland, their main destination is somewhere else in British Columbia.

They may be going to ski, they may be going to enjoy fly fishing, they may be going to experience the excitement of the Kootenays or the Cariboo or the North, but they are coming to British Columbia through Vancouver – through this Pacific gateway – and everyone in our province benefits.

Last year we lost 50 conventions and \$146 million of potential economic activity because our facilities weren't adequate to meet the needs of our customers. We all know that's a lot of jobs: that's economic activity that we can't do without. This new \$495-million expansion – this new Canada-British Columbia partnership, this new Canada Place on the edge of the Pacific Ocean – will support 7,500 permanent jobs. I think it is an incredibly important linchpin of a tourism strategy that will make an enormous difference in the lives of British Columbians in every corner of this province.

It's important to note that the tourism industry did not just come to the table and say, "Please, could you invest?" They have agreed to invest \$90 million as well in the creation of this partnership and the expansion of the convention centre.

This Canada-British Columbia partnership is built around tourism and around transportation infrastructure. Across the province, \$122 million of transportation improvements from the Yoho Bridge on the Trans-Canada Highway to border crossings right here in the Lower Mainland will help goods and services flow back and forth between British Columbia, the rest of Canada, and our largest customer and trading partner to the south.

I am convinced today's announcement is a first step in creating a partnership that will build the economy of our province so that it can be a powerhouse and pull Canada forward to an economic future that's even brighter for every single Canadian.

I am pleased today, Prime Minister, that we are joined by a number of our Olympic athletes. These are Olympic ambassadors who have travelled across the province and pointed out what we can do when we come together.

The commitment of the federal government of \$310 million to our Olympic bid for venue development is something every British Columbian will benefit from. It's something that helps us build a future that's brighter for everyone who lives here.

I know that Mayor Campbell shares my confidence and my pride in the city of Vancouver and the opportunity for Vancouver to again lead the country in terms of economic development and economic activity.

I'm looking forward to building on that partnership. This convention centre expansion is an opportunity that has been waiting for too long. Its promise is there for all of us to reach out and grasp.

Prime Minister, your commitment today of over \$200 million to make sure this project comes to fruition is something we all have to say thank you for.

Thank you for your commitment; thank you for recognizing the contribution that British Columbia can make; and thank you for helping create a Canada-British Columbia partnership, which will reflect the values that we all share as Canadians. Thank you very much.