

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Independent Contractors' Business Association
October 11, 2001

Check Against Delivery

I can't tell you how much I appreciate the work that the ICBA has done over the last number of years. One of the things that I say regularly to people in the business community is that it's important to remember what your principles are, and to repeat them, because you inform the public, you inform the political debate and you get results. ICBA has been a leader in that regard.

It's important that the ICBA maintain its active role in informing the government about what we can do to make your industry work, and how we can make it work better. Because I want everyone to understand that as we stand here today on October 11th, one month after the destructive, horrendous terrorist attack of September 11th, our future is going to be marked by successes.

We have a bright future ahead of us. We have a tough time, but we are going to make sure that British Columbia reaches its full potential and we need your help to do that.

We live in a dramatically differently world today. The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon clearly had a huge impact on all our lives – personal impacts, social impacts, economic impacts.

One of the challenges we all have to confront is that we cannot be motivated by fear. We have to be motivated by the principles that have built our communities, our province and our country: the principles of openness, of honesty, recognizing the great richness we have because we're a multicultural, multi-talented community. All of those are things that will help us build a brighter and a stronger future.

Subsequent to September 11, I think we also recognized how fortunate we are to live in a society that accepts differences – that recognizes the importance of freedom of speech, and religion – and how fortunate we are to have that open border between Canada and the United States. We move back and forth in terms of trade, in terms of opportunities and social connections. One thing that we must not do is let that act of September 11th close down that border, restrict that exchange and change those trade practices.

We have to do everything we can to make sure the 49th parallel remains a border where there's a free flow of information, trade and people, so that we can build a stronger and brighter future on both sides. Our government is committed to do that.

We face a difficult time. We faced a difficult time in August – it's more difficult in October and we'd be kidding ourselves if we didn't say that was the case.

We had the softwood lumber tariff that was imposed. It was wrong, and we're going to do everything we can over the next weeks and months to change that, because our forest products deserve open access to American markets. We believe in free trade because we know that when Canadians are competing on a level playing field we win. We're going to keep fighting for that.

We believe in free enterprise. We believe in private initiative. We believe in creativity. We believe in private sector investment. And we know that in British Columbia, if we become one of the best places in the world to do business, our economy will thrive and our public sector will have the resources it needs to follow. That's our goal, and that's what I ask you to help us with as we strive to achieve those efforts.

In our first 90 days we undertook a number of objectives and we talked to British Columbians about them. We said we would repeal fixed wage legislation. We repealed fixed wage legislation. We said that we would open up tendering again in the province. We've opened it up. We said we'd restore the secret ballot. We've restored the secret ballot to the Labour Code.

We said that there would be the same rules for certification as for de-certification. You've got the same rules for certification as de-certification in British Columbia today. We said we would outlaw sectoral bargaining. We have outlawed sectoral bargaining in the province of British Columbia.

That's just the beginning. I'm sure you will ask, "What's next? How are we going to build this economy, so you have a future in your business and your enterprise in Prince George, in Prince Rupert, in Cranbrook, Nanaimo, Vancouver, and Maple Ridge?"

I'll tell you what we're going to do. We're going to keep following the pattern we set: we're going to keep doing what we said we were going to do. We told you that we were going to have a dramatic cut in personal income taxes. We now have the lowest base rate of personal income tax for any jurisdiction in Canada for the bottom two-tax brackets. And by January 1st we will have the second lowest marginal income tax of any jurisdiction in this country.

We said that we were going to try and make our business environment more competitive. We have started removing the corporate capital tax. By September of next year there will be no corporate capital tax in British Columbia. We said we wanted to encourage productivity. We've removed the tax on machinery and equipment, to encourage productivity.

There is more to be done and we know that. But if we set as our goal to create a business environment that attracts investment, that attracts enterprise, that attracts the creativity of people and individuals, I can guarantee you this – we may be going through a tough time in British Columbia in 2001, but in 2002 and 2003 and 2004 things are going to start to take off in this province. There are going to be jobs, there are going to be opportunities and there is going to be hope again in the province of British Columbia.

We've already asked for your help. We have a commitment to reduce the amount of regulation on business enterprises over the next three years by a third. We have established a task force, and we're saying to you directly, "Tell us what we need to do. Tell us what doesn't work. Tell us what we need to change so that we can make sure that while we maintain public health, public safety, and a safe working environment, we are not simply imposing regulation for regulation's sake – that we're not simply imposing a cost on you for no public benefit."

Every Minister in our government knows that one of the ways they will be measured in terms of their accountability and their success is in how effective they are at removing the regulatory burden from British Columbia that holds us back and stops our economy from growing the way it should. We need your help in that, and I ask for your commitment to help us carry that out.

We are facing a number of other issues over the next months that are also going to require decisive action. Let me use three words here: "Workers' Compensation Board." As I talk to small business across this province, it doesn't matter which corner of the province I'm, after they talk about the tax burden that was on them the next thing they talk about is the Workers' Compensation Board.

We are going to change it. We are going to work to fix it. We need your help to make sure that we act in a sensible and a supportable way that protects workers, that protects employers and that allows us to move forward.

People in the oil and gas industry tell me that their WCB rates in British Columbia are two times what they are in Alberta. We should be concerned about that. So we need to put in a place a strong and resilient framework for WCB that provides for accountability, that ensures we take care of workers, and creates mutual responsibility.

And another three words: "Employment Standards Act." We are going to need help from you in revising the Employment Standards Act. We want to make sure that it meets the needs of the modern economy.

The modern economy recognizes that the most powerful asset we have in any enterprise is the people who work for us. A backhoe doesn't work if there's not someone sitting in it and operating it. I'm pretty sure that if you know a great backhoe operator, you're going to go back to him or her time and time again to get their service. People are what make the economy work. Employers' most important asset is their employees. We want to create flexibility, and the opportunity for your employees and you to work together to create an enterprise that's successful.

When it's successful, it creates more investment. It creates stable long term jobs. And there isn't a British Columbian who doesn't want to have a stable, long term job to protect him or her family. That's what we want to create in this province and we recognize how important your industry is in providing that.

Another one of the things we have to do is look at our budgets. The budget speech from the previous government said not just that we have a surplus this year, but a balanced budget next year and a balanced budget the year after that. We had a financial review panel come in. What they actually discovered was a \$3 billion structural deficit next year leading to what could be a \$5 billion structural deficit the year after that.

Each of us has a choice to make: we can either bring financial sanity back to the government, or not. We said we were going to balance the budget by our third complete budget year. In February 2004 we will give you a balanced budget.

The reason is that we believe these massive deficits that built up over the last decade are holding our economy back and our government back. Those massive deficits are taxes on our kids. And when deficits are not providing for any long-term capital plan or any long-term service that our children will ever take advantage of, we're really offloading our responsibilities onto the next generation. Our government wants that to stop.

As we bring financial sanity back to the province, we are going to have to make a lot of very difficult decisions. But we are going to make them, because we know if we do we will create the foundation to build a brighter, more prosperous, sustainable future for every British Columbian.

We are going to do things differently than before. Changing the name does nothing. Changing the substance, the accountability structures and the way government acts all make a difference.

We remain committed to have three-year capital plans. We're going to be able to plan out, whether it's school construction, hospital construction, or our highway construction. We don't believe government is the only agency that can do that. We want to look for public-private partnerships, for private investment, enterprise, imagination and innovation to come forward and say, "we can deliver this service better."

We have already had a significant number of proposals of how we could deliver services in a more cost-effective way. We are going to follow through on that. I say to the ICBA as well as to other groups, come in and tell us how you think this can work so it's cost effective, so it's sensible and taps into the creativity of the business community.

We were going through one of our reviews the other day. One of the industry segments that's incredibly important to us is oil and gas. We believe that by changing some of the policies and frameworks we've had – by acting boldly to create a competitive environment where our oil and gas industry is competitive – we can generate 8,000 additional new jobs, and create more private sector investment in British Columbia.

We have to do that in oil and gas. We have to do it in tourism. Tourism right now generates \$1 billion of revenue. We want it to be \$2 billion. What do we have to do to achieve that? We have to have more hotels. We have to have more recreational opportunities. We have to be going out and encouraging that to take place.

The construction industry generates about \$16 billion of construction every year in the province. We want to move that up. We want more construction activity. We want more houses built. We want to make sure that when we build our hospitals and colleges that we're building in the most cost effective and sensible way. We need your help to do that.

We are going to set the highest standards. And we know when we set those standards, there are people who are willing to meet those as we move forward. We can do that if we work together, if we trust one another, if we are open and honest about what we are trying to do and how we can accomplish it.

Over the last few weeks, we've had some people who've said now is not the time to act. "Let's just stay where we were before. Let's not try and go out and reach out and be one of the best places in the world to do business. Let's not try and build the economy in the way that we know we have to. We can't convince the economy to do what we want, we have to do what the economy wants."

What the economy wants is openness. What the economy wants is opportunity. What the economy wants is encouragement and investment. We have to create an environment that provides those things, whether it's in construction, in education, in health care. We can close our eyes and wish the world would go away, but it's not.

So our goal and objective is to keep track of where we are going. We have an incredibly bright future in British Columbia if we get our fundamentals right. Every one of you in your businesses has to deal with your fundamentals: as business goes up you may do a little more, and as business comes down you may do a little less, and you are flexible enough to reflect that.

Government is part of that solution. We have to share in the burdens of the solution. So I've said to our Ministries, the government has to live within its means. That means every Ministry with the exception of health care and public education is going to look at significant reductions in the dollars that are available.

That does not mean a significant reduction in services. One Deputy Minister came to me as part of the review that he was doing and said, "I've looked throughout the government. We have 280 people right now who are delivering this particular service. I believe I can deliver the same or better quality service with 70." Is there anybody who doesn't think I have a responsibility to recognize that statement?

Remember, there is no such thing as government money. Every cent that any government spends is your money. My government believes you have given us your trust to manage those dollars responsibly, and to make sure we're getting value for every dollar we spend. It's not good enough to say, "Eliminate government waste everywhere except in my community. Eliminate government waste everywhere except in my Ministry." We're going to eliminate government waste across all Ministries and across all communities because that's how we can build an economic future in British Columbia.

I want to just reiterate and close with this: Imagine what we can be as a province. Imagine what we can do as a province. Imagine what you can do in your enterprise or in your business. Then tell us what we have to do so you can recognize that potential.

Imagine what it would be like for British Columbia to lead again. I want to thank you for discussing the Olympics tonight. The 2010 Winter Olympics is our opportunity to show the world again what British Columbia can do. It will require construction. It will require us to invest. But we're ready and willing, and we're working with the federal government to make sure we can get there because we think it's time to show the world how good British Columbia can be.

We want British Columbia to be its best. We want to reach out for that gold medal of the Olympics. We want to reach out for the best in everybody, in every sector of our economy, in every community across this province. British Columbia is still the best province in the best country in the world and together we will realize that potential.