

Premier Gordon Campbell
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Check Against Delivery

I want to congratulate Tourism Vancouver on the launch of their new look and their new brand. I also want to say thanks to Michael for his generous introduction and to all of you for the warmth you've shown me today. It is a great industry, and it's a great province, and you've got a great future. And you've got a great future because all of you in every part of your province are thinking about what's special about where you live.

It has been really fun helping to build a platform that allows us to take full advantage of the incredible assets that we have in this province, the incredible natural gifts that British Columbia brings for all of us.

I've been fortunate not just in being able to work with COTA but also with a truly exceptional caucus, all of whom have great feelings for their communities, for their regions of the province and a special feeling for tourism and what it has to offer people in British Columbia.

I'm particularly pleased to be here with some of my colleagues, who I'd like to introduce. First, the Minister of Small Business and Economic Development, a true advocate not just for tourism, but for all that it offers to our quality of life: the Minister of Small Business and Economic Development, John Les. Thanks to John for his leadership.

We always think about the big things, but there are a lot of small things that make a difference in tourism, and one of them is the quality of our roads and our transportation infrastructure. And there's no one who has done more to advocate for reinvestment in transportation, from the resource and rural roads to the major highways of the province that we're investing in than the Minister of Transportation, Kevin Falcon.

Kevin, thank you.

There's no single area in the province that has more private sector investment, has created more opportunity, has created more jobs in every region of the

province than the initiative that's been undertaken by your industry in resort development. The Minister of State for Resort Development is in charge of making sure that \$4 billion of potential investment comes to fruition for the benefit of families across this province. Patty Sahota is with us today as well.

I recall the first time we had Tourism B.C. come in and talk to us and the minister at that time was today's Minister of Provincial Revenue, Rick Thorpe. I said: Rick, I want you to think of a plan that doubles tourism in the next decade. I want you to bring people together and get them excited about what we can reach for.

And I loved the expression "the excitement of exceeding expectations." Let's exceed expectations together; let's drive one another; let's work with one another. Let's give people in this province something to be proud of and to strive for. And that was Rick Thorpe, and I'm glad Rick is with us today too. Thanks, Rick.

Sitting here today in 2005 we recognize that we're less than five years away from 2010, and that we're less than ten years away from the date that we set to double the amount of tourism activity taking place in the province. Five years from 2010 and the activity in just a year is going to change. The world's focus is going to change. It's going to shift to us, to British Columbia. They're going to be watching us, because as soon as Torino's over, we're the one to watch.

I'm also really pleased today that I have someone with me who actually was one of the key drivers the last time British Columbia was responsible for welcoming the world and showing off our entire province. You remember Expo 86? Remember there was a site there called the Expo 86 site? What people didn't realize when we started was the pavilion for British Columbia was this entire province. And people from every part of the world came here saying: "It's a great fair, but what an incredible province you live in. What an incredible place you live in."

And sometimes it takes us a little bit of time, but you know what we've discovered? We actually live in the best place on Earth. And when we look at the best place on Earth, it's important for us to remember that sometimes how we present this place is critically important.

We've come through some pretty tough years recently - SARS, avian flu, forest fire - and in spite of that, the industry is back, the industry is feeling optimistic, the industry is feeling excited about its future. And they should be. We're looking forward to 2005 generating almost \$10 billion of economic activity in this

province. We're looking for over 23 million visitors to British Columbia. And that's just this year; we're going to increase those numbers in the years ahead.

Tourism is doing what the province is doing. It's moving from a time of recovery to a time of discovery. This is your time to discover the best that you have to offer the world, discover new ways you can give your product to those who come and visit you - whether it's in the Northern Rockies or the North Coast, whether it's on northern Vancouver Island or the southeast in the Kootenays - the opportunities in resort development are vast.

So today I'm pleased to tell you that we are going to do something that's very important when you have a visitor come. We're going to let them know they've arrived in the best place on earth. We're going to let them know that they have arrived in British Columbia, Canada, the best place on earth. Over the next few weeks and months, starting in March, we'll be launching a brand new B.C. signed Gateway program.

The signs will look something like the sign that's behind me. Imagine this sign being 17 feet. Imagine the flag being 25 feet and waving at over a dozen gateways into the province of British Columbia: Highway 99 at the Peace Arch border crossing, Highway 11 at the Sumas border crossing, Highway 15 at the Pacific border crossing, Highway 93 in the Kootenay National Park, Highway 1 near Golden, Highway 16 in the Mount Robson Provincial Park, Highway 2 near Pouce Coupe, and Highway 37 at Watson Lake.

Over the long term you're going to see these welcoming signs at our airports, at our ocean ports, the great new port of Prince Rupert, the Port of Vancouver, in your airports in Prince George and Terrace and Fort St. John and Kamloops and Cranbrook.

All over this province people will know when they come to British Columbia, they have arrived and we are glad they're here. When they come here, we want them to know they're on the best place on earth. We want them to stay in the best place on earth. And when they go home, we want them to tell everyone it's time for you to go to the best place on earth: British Columbia, Canada.

Is there anyone in this room who doesn't know that we live or feel that we live in the best place on earth, the best tourist destination on earth?

If you've rafted down the Chilko River, you know you're in an incredibly special place. If you're kayaking in the Broken Island group, you know that's where you want to be. If you're soaking in the Fairmont Hot Springs, if you're wine tasting in Lake Okanagan, if you're hiking in the Muskwa-Kechika, if you're mountain biking on the Sunshine Coast, if you're visiting the U'mista cultural centre in Port Alice, you are in the best place on earth.

Our job is to make people feel welcome, make people know there is even more for them to discover in this great province. That's what you've done, that's the spirit you've given to British Columbia, and on behalf of everyone in British Columbia let me say thank you for reaching out and making people feel welcome to our province. And as we bring them here we want them to leave as ambassadors; we want them to feel the excitement of exceeding their expectations.

We've talked about that with the 2010 Olympics. We want athletes to feel that we've exceeded their expectations. We want visitors from all over the world to feel that way. But this isn't just about an Olympic year. This is about a decade, a golden decade of opportunity, a golden decade of reaching out and touching people and touching their lives in ways they couldn't imagine when they landed here in British Columbia.

You'll notice that our sign says British Columbia, Canada. We are part of Canada's brand. We are something that Canada offers. We offer a society that's diverse, that's rich in cultural background, with First Nations that offer all kinds of artistic and cultural opportunities. We are a country and we are a province that's proud of our traditions and proud of where we can go and proud of the fact that we reflect the strength of diversity. That's a gift we can give to the world when they come to British Columbia, Canada.

If we work together in partnership; if we recognize and reflect on what your imagination, your creativity, your delivery of your services across the province can do; when you think about what that can do and how the government can create a framework for you to excel in your communities and in your regions, that makes a huge difference.

We talked to people, and one of those people was Don Monsour. I said: "Don, is this possible? Can we double tourism in a decade?" Don said: "Oh, sure you can, Gord. No problem. We can double them, but you're going to have to keep an environment going in British Columbia that encourages investment. You're

going to have to eliminate the kinds of regulations that stifle and kill entrepreneurial activity. You're going to have to encourage small business."

We've tried to do that over the last three years and we're watching the results. We're watching as small business optimism is up. We're watching as investment to the province is up. We're watching as we follow a path focused on the fundamentals while we build an even brighter future for all British Columbians. And Don, you said that would work, and so far you're right. I want to say thank you for that.

Now, you guys have all talked to Rod Harris at one time or other, right? Ask him a question; he'll give you statistics. "What's the weather like today, Rod?" "Well, I don't know, but it's the sunniest February we've ever had in the history of the world" That's Rod. "Well, he said: "We're going to get people coming to the province and they're going to have a great time. If we do a little bit more marketing. Any chance for more marketing money?"

I said: "Rod, how about we give you \$25 million more dollars so we can double your marketing budget to \$50 million." Rod said: "I think that might work." Folks, that's what we've done, and I think it's going to work. I want to say thank you, Rod, for that.

Then I said to Mike. "Mike, can we double tourism revenues in a decade?" Mike said: "You know, Gord, I think we can, but you're going to have to pay attention to local communities. You're going to have to reach out and make sure you expand all these opportunities across our province."

I said: "How about this, Mike? Why don't we give \$25 million to local communities through the UBCM so they can talk about what they have to offer, what their special market is?" Mike said to me: "Gord, if you do that it just might work." So we gave \$25 million to the UBCM for local communities across the province to market their communities the way they want to market them.

Mike, I think that's going to work, and I want to say thank you for that.

Today I'm pleased to let you know the third phase of government's effort to provide you with the supports and the opportunities you need to make sure we reach our goals - to make sure we have the excitement of exceeding our expectations and doubling tourism revenues within ten years.

I can tell you today that we are going to provide the city of Golden and its new Gateway to B.C. visitors' centre in Golden with \$235,000. That's on top of the \$1.3 federal-provincial contribution so they can make sure their golden gateway meets leading environmental standards, shows off British Columbia products and welcomes 150,000 visitors every single year

It will say this is British Columbia. This is the best place on earth. These are the products we have to offer. Welcome to Golden, welcome to Kicking Horse country, welcome to British Columbia, Canada. Two hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars will help them do exactly what they want to do. I want to thank the folks in Golden for that.

We're also going to be seeking legislative approval in the next few days for a \$2-million extension or contribution towards a new gateway information centre in Osoyoos. It'll be a 5,000-square-foot welcoming centre to the entire province of British Columbia that will provide special recognition of the South Okanagan, of the desert landscapes that we have to offer, of the wine country that we have in British Columbia and make people know that when you come to southern British Columbia you can't be in a better part of the world.

But as we think about where we can go we have to think about the entire province of British Columbia. We have a number of regional tourism associations across B.C. that could use some support. So let me tell you today that we will also be offering \$12 million in one-time funding to six B.C. tourism regions across the province. We'll be asking for approval for that within the next few days as well.

The \$2 million we're going to give to the Chilcotin coast region is going to make a big difference. Imagine what you can do. Imagine telling people about the land without limits: The home of the Gold Rush and Billy Barker days, world-class cross-country skiing, some of the best fly-fishing in the world, the Anaheim Lake rodeo, the Merritt Mountain Music Festival. Those sorts of things are things that we can share with people from across the world when they come to the Coast-Chilcotin.

What about the \$2 million for northern British Columbia, almost five times their annual funding right now. Imagine how that can be used to draw cruise passengers across the north, from Prince Rupert to Dawson, from the great northern port that the Asia Pacific is going to know all the way to Mile Zero of the Alaska Highway.

Think of what it has to offer people who want to go on a llama trek. Think of what it's like to water raft in some of those great whitewater rivers across the north. Think of the opportunities that that represents.

There'll be \$2 million for Vancouver Island. That's four times the annual funding they have today. Imagine what you can promote on Vancouver Island: the spas on the east coast, spelunking on the North Island, storm season on the west coast, the Royal B.C. Museum.

Two million dollars for the Vancouver coast region. Imagine exploring the lower parts of the Fraser River and Burns Bog. Imagine visiting the largest lunar New Year's celebration outside of China. Imagine being here for the enormous Vaisaki celebrations that we have here in the Lower Mainland.

Two million dollars for the Kootenay Rockies. Imagine what the Kootenay Rockies has to offer, from the new Kicking Horse resort all the way down to Red Mountain and Panorama. Some of the best golf courses in the world, unquestionably the best fly-fishing in the world and some of the most incredible hot springs in the world, all in the Kootenay-Rockies area.

Imagine \$2 million for the Thompson-Okanagan. Imagine sitting by the side of Lake Okanagan and sipping some of the world's best wine. Imagine being in the North Thompson and enjoying that. Imagine house boating in the Shuswap. Imagine sitting in Lake Okanagan and sipping some wine.

Imagine being in the festival capital of Canada and watching all of that sporting activity. Then imagine being beside Lake Okanagan and sipping some of the world's best wine. Imagine skiing in Sun Peaks. Imagine what you have to offer in the Thompson-Okanagan. Imagine what we have to offer in British Columbia.

The important thing about the \$2 million for the regional tourism association is this. It's yours. You decide. You make the decisions and you decide with your creativity and your imagination what makes your place the best place on earth. Let's make sure the world knows that your place is the best place on earth and that it's part of our province. I know working with you we can do that.

Today let me say again how much I appreciate all that your industry has done, all the small businesses that work 24 hours a day, seven days a week to make sure that people get the best opportunities to experience British Columbia, to feel

the spirit of British Columbia, to know that we know how lucky we are to live in this incredible province.

I ask you today to imagine the next ten years, not in terms of revenues, but in terms of experience, in terms of building understanding between people and cultures and parts of the world. When we invite the world to British Columbia, we open not just doors of opportunity but doors of understanding and doors of learning. We build bridges that will be resilient and robust in difficult times. We build bridges of opportunity for the next generation of British Columbians.

Imagine what you want British Columbia to be like. Imagine how you want British Columbia to feel ten years from now.

We've just been given approved destination status by China. Between now and 2020 there will be 100 million Chinese tourists traveling around the world. Imagine how we can take advantage of that. Imagine those tourists coming to our province and what we can offer them. Imagine what we can learn from them as we build an even brighter future for all of our province and all of our country. We have an exceptional time ahead of us.

Your industry has always been willing to set a goal and to reach higher and higher in attaining that goal, something that defines the spirit of tourism in British Columbia. It's something that defined us in Expo 86 as the world came and visited us here and said it was a memorable experience they would never forget.

Imagine what we can do as we move to 2010, as we exceed expectations in a golden decade of opportunity, a golden decade of hospitality, a golden decade of learning, a golden decade of service and a golden decade for tourism.

Thank you very much.