

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Burnaby Board of Trade
April 30, 2002

Check Against Delivery

Looking at the Burnaby Board of Trade today and thinking about where you were just a few short years ago gives me great hope about the future of the province.

In 1999 there were 200 members of the board of trade here in Burnaby; now there are over 700. In 1999 you had a \$250,000 deficit; this year you're going to break even. In 1999 you had about two events a year; now you're having one every week.

I want to talk to you today about what has happened in the last year in British Columbia, because in spite of the challenges we face, I am very excited about our future. We still live in an exceptional province with exceptional resources.

Last year at this time as I was travelling all over the province, very few people said, "No, we don't have to make any changes; everything is just the way we like it; we think we should keep doing exactly what we've done."

As we move to improve our economy and our health services, and to focus our resources on students in the classroom, there are going to be some changes in government. If we want to get the results we had in the past, we should just keep doing what was done in the past. But if we want to improve things – to get different results – then it does require a different road for all of us.

I want to talk about four specific areas today: institutional change, economic change, change in health care and change in our education system.

We needed institutional change so that everyone who was elected, regardless of what party they were in, was invited to be part of the solutions. You're very fortunate in Burnaby that you elected people who are contributing every day to solving the economic problems, dealing with health-care struggles, and making sure students are getting the support they need in the education system.

I'm very pleased that Richard Lee is here from Burnaby North, Patty Sahota is here from Burnaby-Edmonds, John Nuraney is here from Burnaby-Willingdon and Harry Bloy is here from Burquitlam. All of them are working tirelessly to get excitement back into people's sense of where we are going in this province and what we can do.

Institutional change requires a number of things. First, it requires us to do the things we said we were going to do.

Once I was a teacher, and I was held pretty high in public opinion. Then I started to work for government – and this was in the '70s, so working for the government was still a very

good thing. Then I went outside government and became a developer – what a frightening fall.

When I was a developer, I got involved in the community and got excited about the prospects of the future in the city. Some of my friends said, “Why don’t you run for city council?” What I didn’t realize is that as soon as you get elected, you become a politician. That’s even lower on the scale of public opinion.

Once I lived in a place that didn’t have a public life – where change was made by the use of bullets instead of the use of ballots. One of the great gifts that we have as Canadians and British Columbians is we inherited the right to make choices for ourselves and shape our own future with the exercise of our democratic ballot.

Some people have to run for office for this system to work. I don’t know anyone who has run for office who didn’t try to improve the quality of life for the citizens of the province or the country or the community they were serving, whether they were school trustees or city councillors, MLAs or MPs.

One of the things we have to do to restore trust is to say to people, “This is what we intend to do” – and then carry it out. In four years let the system judge whether or not the decisions and choices we made were right or not.

We had a 90-day agenda. Last year at this time I would have told you that within 90 days we would have a dramatic cut in personal income tax, we would have balanced budget legislation, we would bring back the secret ballot to the Labour Code and have the same rules for certification as decertification.

I would have told you we would have truth in budgeting legislation and be keeping our books according to generally accepted accounting principles. We would have made education an essential service.

There were people who said it would never happen. I am proud of the fact that within 90 days every single one of those commitments was carried out for the people of British Columbia.

I also said during the election that you should take the New Era document that we put out, and that is on our Web site still, and hold us to account for all of those items in that document. That is when you reconnect people and make public life real for people again.

I want to talk about some of the things we have done to turn around the economy, and some of the signs that the economy is turning around in spite of some very difficult times.

First, last July the Financial Review Panel reported out on the province’s financial status. Unfortunately they told us that government was operating in a fundamentally unsustainable way.

Is that the result that we wanted? Did we want to have government that was piling debt upon debt?

In 120 years, British Columbia as a public entity had amassed \$17 billion in debts. In the last 10 years under the previous government, that was more than doubled. Do we want to continue that? Is it a good idea to continue to build up that debt load on the next generation of British Columbians?

I am now 54 years old, and my generation has borrowed more from my kids and my grandkids than I want them to. I think it's time our generation started paying back to the future so our kids can have the choices and opportunities we all got from our parents.

That requires difficult decisions to be made. In the election we said that we would protect health-care and education funding, but that we were going to look everywhere else in government to see what government should be doing.

When we answered the question of whether government should be doing something or not, we asked ourselves, "Are we doing that in the best way possible? Are we delivering that service to you in the most valuable way we can?"

There is no such thing as government money. It is all your money, and we take it out of your pockets. You might work 100 or 120 hours a week, or whatever your workweek is in your business. We take your money and say thanks.

When we do that, we have an obligation to make sure we are spending those resources as effectively as we possibly can. That is our challenge as we try to restore financial health to British Columbia.

It is very difficult to manage a system if you don't know what you are trying to accomplish. Just imagine that today you leave this lunch, get your car and start driving – but somehow you don't know where you're going. How will you know if you get there? That is what was happening in government – there were no plans.

We had health authorities that didn't get their budgets until nine months into the fiscal year. How could they plan that way? So we put out a three-year plan, and next year we'll have another three-year plan. Of course, as soon as we say, "Here is our plan," instead of people thinking three years out, they start thinking three weeks out.

This is a difficult transition. We'll do it by working with people, by setting targets, by having standards and by holding ourselves to account. We will have balanced the budget by February of 2004.

Let me tell you something we've done in British Columbia that has not been done in any other jurisdiction that I am aware of. Each cabinet minister has their cabinet stipend reduced by 20 per cent. They can earn that back, but only if they meet their ministry's financial and service goals and if our government meets its financial and service goals.

That focuses people and creates personal accountability for what's happening with your resources.

Things we've discovered in our year in office have required us to change some of our plan. For example, we said to you last year that we would protect health-care funding. We said that because health-care funding had gone up by over a billion dollars last year.

We looked at the challenges in health care and said that we have to pay our nurses so we can keep them in the workforce, because without caregivers you don't have a very good health-care system. We said that we have to remunerate doctors properly. We wanted to be sure we had the people that were essential to the health-care system so we could provide care to patients.

This year we increased health funding by another \$1.1 billion: We understand how important health care is. But if you haven't got standards – if you haven't got a plan – you are going to keep pushing money into the system without looking at whether or not you're getting what you want out of the system. So for the first time there are provincewide standards to make sure we are focusing on the needs of patients.

We inherited 52 separate health regions in the province – 52 authorities, community health councils, community health services societies. We said we were going to change the administrative structure: it is now down to five regional authorities and one provincial authority.

There is no total savings there: all that's changing is that the resources are focused on patients. There is a 43 per cent cut in administrative costs in health care over the next three years. Every one of those dollars is going to patient care.

Let me just tell you one planning example that would make a huge difference in health care. How many of you have ever driven down Grandview Highway or 12th Avenue West into Vancouver? The largest single building in the city of Vancouver sits on the corner of 12th Avenue and Oak Street. That was rezoned by the hospital in 1983 before I was on city council. They signed on to build this great big building.

The shell was built in 1991, all with borrowed money. After a while a structural engineer said, "You'd better start heating this shell because if you don't, the structural integrity of the building is going to start to deteriorate." So we taxpayers started heating the shell.

Then people having trouble getting the accommodation thought it would be a nice place for them to use for shelter. So the authorities said we would have to hire security people to keep those people from using this shell for temporary shelter.

So now we're paying interest, heating costs and security costs for a building that doesn't have one patient in it. There is a good chance that by next year – 2003, 20 years later, over \$100 million in cost later – that building will start providing care to patients. But \$100 million went out the window because people didn't have a plan.

My wife Nancy and I worked in Nigeria for two years. We had a motorcycle accident, Nancy fell on her arm, and when we took her to what they call a hospital in Nigeria, I wished I was home.

We have a great health-care system here. It's not sustainable the way we've done it, because we haven't put patients at the centre of the agenda. We have to change the way we are delivering health services for patients – patients on the Lower Mainland, patients in the North, patients in the Kootenays and patients on the Coast. We have to think, “Are we marshalling our resources to make sure patients are cared for?”

As a community, we want results – we want care in a timely way, and we want waiting lists to start shrinking as opposed to continuing to grow. I believe we can deliver that if we are willing to be imaginative enough and to challenge the status quo.

If we're not willing to challenge the status quo, we will continue to get the same results. If you do what you've always done, you will get what you've always gotten. We have to be willing to challenge ourselves to deal with it.

We are doing the same thing with education. We are saying public education is public. It includes parents and teachers and school trustees and school administrators. We are saying students have to be where we are focusing our objectives.

We have to be flexible enough to meet students' needs across the province: one-size-fits-all solutions don't work. Again, that's a big change, and changes in themselves create concern. If people engage in the discussion, though, we have a chance of creating an education system that is second to none.

We have a very good education system, but we can do even better. We have a good health-care system, but we can do better. And we can do better in a way that is financially sound and sustainable in providing those two critical services.

We will not have excellent public services if we do not have a thriving private-sector economy. In the past, we have been a province that encouraged entrepreneurship, encouraged imagination, encouraged risk-taking.

Imagine people like Paul Lee who started out here in Burnaby with Electronic Arts and said, “I'm going to become the global leader in creating software that is everywhere.” When I visit Maui, I go to the theatre, and there's an ad that says Electronic Arts, and my chest gets a little bigger and I say, “That is in Burnaby British Columbia – way to go! We're out there, we're big!”

Imagine what it takes to do that. It takes some risk, it takes time, it takes effort, it takes perseverance, and it takes focus. It takes an understanding that there are people in your community behind you who are going to celebrate your success, not try and take it away.

That is what we want to do in our government: celebrate the success; get more Electronic Arts; get people moving; get people excited again.

That's what the Burnaby Board of Trade can do with us. We have all the tools we need in this province to be the best you can imagine. We have the natural resources; we have the human resources – you, your friends, your colleagues, the people you work with. Your imagination and energy can drive this economy forward.

We are going to turn this economy around, and as we encourage investment and increase productivity, we are going to create the resources we need for exceptional public-sector services – services that are accountable to you, services that meet your needs, services that meet the needs of our future.

There is nothing more exciting for me than looking into the future of British Columbia and meeting the people of this province who are building the future. Through the month of May we are having small business seminars throughout the province to make sure we hear from small business about how to reduce the load on them. It's the regulatory burden; it's the tax burden; it's a burden that they're not getting the services they deserve.

We want to be a government that provides services to the private sector so they can excel, and services to you as a member of the public, as a patient, as a student – services that will enable you to reach as high as you desire and to know if you grasp that far we will be right behind you as you pull all of us up with your energy and your dream.

Thank you very much.