

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Vancouver Board of Trade
October 15, 2002

Check Against Delivery

I want to start with a thank you to the Board of Trade for the leadership you've shown for more than a century to the city of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia. I want to say thank you for the constructive and thoughtful suggestions you've brought forward to government – not just in the last 16 months, but in the years before that.

It's hard to believe that the Board of Trade was formed in 1887. That's when the first CPR passenger train arrived in Vancouver.

After its first year of activity, the Board of Trade had some recommendations for the province. They wanted us to build a bridge across the north arm of the Fraser, abolish direct taxation and work to support mining development.

What has changed in the last 115 years? I'm still hearing about those bridges. Nothing has changed – but everything has changed.

Sixteen months ago we were given the trust of the people of British Columbia, who told us they wanted our province to be turned around. They'd gone through a decade that was very difficult, and they knew that change had to be made.

Many times people in this room would say to me, "Are you guys going to be tough enough to make the changes you have to make?"

I think the question we're really asking ourselves is if we have the fortitude, the perseverance and the dedication to return our province to our children in better shape than we received it from our parents.

There is only one way for us to move forward, and that is to deal deliberately and directly with the many challenges that confront British Columbians.

Look at the people at your table. How many of you are thinking that your table is looking a whole lot younger than it used to look?

One of the most significant challenges that we face is the demographic challenge. Our aging population creates new and more difficult and more complex problems. We can't avoid them: We have to confront them, and we have to deal with them.

Sixteen months ago when we ran for office, we said we were going to carry out a program to revitalize our province's economy – to revitalize the private sector so that it was flourishing again, so British Columbia was a place where people wanted to invest.

We've taken steps to allow us to do that. We've reduced 17 separate taxes in British Columbia, putting 1.1 billion more dollars into individuals' pockets and creating \$400 million in tax relief for businesses. We hope those dollars are going to go back into the economy.

We told you we were going to eliminate unnecessary regulations, I'm pleased to say that in the first 15 months in office, we've eliminated over 18,000 regulations that have been burdening British Columbians for no public good.

We've just introduced the new Companies Act, which will hopefully encourage people to create new enterprises throughout the province, without the kind of interference that's been in place in the past.

We've eliminated 955 fees and licences with an estimated savings of \$18 million a year. We've just introduced legislative changes to the WCB, reducing the number of appeals and giving both employees and employers the decision they need within 15 months instead of within 36 months.

All of those things are steps to create a more vital economy and a more active private sector.

I was reading a newspaper today, and one of the columnists said, "What is the rush to balance the budget?"

Let's ask a couple of questions about that. Has anyone ever noticed a time that seemed to be good for government to get its financial house in order? I've been involved in government now for almost 20 years, and I cannot remember once when government said it was time to get their financial house in order and the special interests that benefited from government overspending stood up and said, "Good idea."

We just went through a decade of pretty strong economic activity in the world. Because we didn't get our house in order then, we don't have a choice today.

I'm 54 years old; I'm the front of the baby boom. When I graduated from university, I was 22. The total public debt in British Columbia was \$2.84 billion.

I have a son named Nicholas; he's 22, and he's about to graduate from university. The total public debt that Nicholas and his generation are going to inherit from our generation is \$40 billion.

We are losing time and we are losing opportunities. We are consuming opportunities for our kids because we haven't decided to be disciplined ourselves. Our government is going to be financially disciplined, we are going to be accountable and we are going to balance our budget in February of 2004 just as we said we would.

How are things working? The signs are right: since the beginning of this year we have created 90,000 new jobs in British Columbia. No province has had the job growth British Columbia has – a 4.7 per cent increase in employment in the last nine to 10 months.

British Columbia is leading the country in housing starts: we've got the strongest percentage increase forecast for housing starts next year. In the second quarter, our retail sales were up by two times the national average. New vehicle sales in July were up 18.1 per cent, leading the country.

Remember when British Columbia always led the country? It's time for us to look at that as a goal in every measure of economic activity: in every indicator, British Columbia wants to be number 1. To do that, we're going to have to work hard together.

As we look to the future, which is where I think we should start to focus our efforts and our energies, it's important for us to raise our vision above the lower horizon – to look to where we want to go and what we want to be as a province.

With our natural resources and our talented people, there is absolutely no reason that British Columbia should not be making a major contribution to the Canadian economy and to the quality of life of every single person who lives here. We are going to do that if we work together.

As we look at the challenges in front of us – whether they are in health care, education or revitalizing the economy – we have to recognize that our generation has been a consuming generation. We are a generation that has taken, and it's time for us to return to the generation that's following us.

One of the areas that we want to do that in – and that the board has been engaged in throughout its history, as I mentioned – is opening up the province to the resources we have.

A critical part of that is transportation.

There's a new kind of transportation we all talk about, which is the transportation of information – the transportation of ideas. We intend as a government to make sure each British Columbian, regardless of the size of community they live in, has access to broadband Internet capabilities, because that's one of the ways you create a solid foundation for a long-term and stable future for the citizens in our resource communities across this province.

A little while ago, Ike Barber of Slocan Forest Products made the largest single gift in the history of private donations to the University of British Columbia: \$20 million. He gave it to the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre, which will connect every single person in the province to library facilities at the University of British Columbia and around the world.

It is a huge gift, it is a huge donation, and it's something that will help build our information infrastructure in British Columbia so that it is second to none.

What Ike Barber has done reminds us of what each of us has to do: We have to make sure British Columbia is connected.

For almost a decade we did not invest in our transportation infrastructure. Our province intends to do that because when we invest in transportation, we open up the province to opportunity.

Whether it's Highway 16 in the North or Highway 1 through the Rockies, we want to be sure that the people who live here are travelling on safe and secure transportation infrastructure.

Through the Kicking Horse Canyon on the Trans-Canada Highway, over 20 people have died in the last five years. Dozens and dozens and dozens of accidents have taken place.

We've said to the federal government, "We want you to understand that Highway 1 is our opening to the rest of the country. It is our top transportation priority."

I am confident that working together with a fifty-fifty share between the federal government and the provincial government, we will open the doors to British Columbia.

We will open the doors to commerce, to exchange and to cultural activities so that once again we can take our true leadership role in this province and help drive Canada to where it should be.

This province has the most incredible natural resources and the best forest resources anywhere. Minister of Forests Mike de Jong is going to China this fall to build on a visit we had last year. He's going to Beijing to suggest: "Why don't we allow B.C. forest products to build your athletes' village for the 2008 Olympics? We'll show you the quality of our product, the quality of our workmanship and the ability of British Columbians to meet the needs of the massively growing middle class in China."

They are looking at an economic growth rate of seven per cent a year. We want to take advantage of that. If we do, working not just with the Board of Trade but with our forest industry across this province, I know we'll be opening up opportunities that were not thought of just five years ago.

One of the things we have to do is to open up our minds to the opportunities in front of us. We have a great opportunity in British Columbia. As I've mentioned many times before, I was born here. When I was brought up in this province, there was nothing I didn't feel I could accomplish if I put my mind to it.

The culture of British Columbia was "we can do whatever we want if we're willing to work at it." It was exciting, and we recognized how fortunate we were.

We have an opportunity now in this province that is a generational opportunity – and that’s to host the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games here in Vancouver and Whistler.

We’re going to have a leadership luncheon with the Board of Trade in November on this, but I want people to think for a minute about what the Olympics represents to you. How does it impact on your life? How does it impact on your kids’ lives?

Alcan has just hosted a provincial tour that has touched on community after community. Our young athletes who have gone out there and talked to people all over British Columbia feel nothing but excitement about what can take place.

Each of us knows someone who’s interested in getting a gold medal in hockey or figure skating or curling. I was at the Winter Games in Williams Lake when the Canadian women won their gold medal in hockey. The excitement those young people felt was palpable as the opening of their Games celebrated not just Canada’s gold but their future as young athletes.

Then on the Sunday, when the men played the United States and won the gold medal, 20 million Canadians watched that game – two thirds of the country. Who here didn’t feel pride well up in them as Mario Lemieux skated around the rink with the maple leaf?

Who here didn’t feel pride as those hardened professional athletes held up their gold medals to their children and friends? Who here didn’t feel pride that Canada was number 1 in hockey once again? I felt pride in it, and I’m sure most Canadians did.

Think of what we can do for young British Columbians as we give them the goal of pursuing what is best in themselves – of finding that discipline and dedication in themselves so they can excel.

Think of what that Olympic bid can do for all of us. In the 1980s when we were proposing to move forward with the Expo bid, there were people who said we shouldn’t do it. In fact, it was the same people who are saying we shouldn’t do the Olympic bid right now – not just the same groups: the same people.

The fact of the matter is, they were wrong. They were wrong in 1983, they were wrong in 1984, they were wrong in 1985, they were wrong in 1986, and they are wrong about the Winter and Paralympic Games here in Vancouver this year in 2002, and they will be wrong every year forward.

Why do I say that? Let’s put the facts on the table. The Salt Lake City opening of the Winter Olympic Games had two billion viewers. Can you imagine how much investment you would have to put in to generate anything that would show two billion people the province of British Columbia, the economic opportunities, the quality of life, and the creativity of the folks who live here right in our midst?

What is the actual cost of hosting the Olympic Games? It's \$1.2 to \$1.3 billion. I recognize that's a lot of money, but the great thing about that is those dollars are returned to us by the private sector.

There has not been an Olympic Games that has lost money in the last 25 years. That's significant: they don't want their brand to be hurt by an event in Vancouver that's not properly managed.

We have an event platform that is second to none. We have a commitment from the federal government to share in the creation of the venues. All of those venues will benefit us long-term. The total cost of the creation of the venues is \$620 million.

That \$620 million is shared – \$310 million for the province, \$310 million for the feds. \$110 million of that is to provide for the long-term legacy operation of those facilities so our young people can have the support they need to excel.

The \$87.5 million that will be required for security is shared fifty-fifty with the federal government. There's been \$9 million required for the bid, which has been handled extremely well.

We're in a race that started four years ago. We are almost at the finish line; we are guaranteed a medal – and someone is saying we shouldn't reach for the gold. We are going to reach for the gold, and we are going to get the gold because everyone in this province – in the North, in the South, in the East, in the West – is going to benefit from the economic spinoffs of winning the gold medal and hosting the Vancouver/Whistler Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

An economic impact study done in February of this year showed up to \$10 billion in increased economic activity – in one scenario, 220,000 new jobs.

I would not be being straightforward if I didn't say that some people are questioning that economic impact study. So let's question it; let's pretend it's wrong.

What the economic impact study says is that on the good side, you've \$10 billion of gross domestic product increase, 220,000 new jobs, and \$2.5 billion increased revenue into local, provincial and federal government. That's what it says.

Say it's wrong. Say it's only half that good. Say it's \$5 billion, say it's \$1.25 billion into governments, and say it's only 110,000 new jobs. How many people want to turn their back on that in British Columbia?

When you look at our bid right now, we are estimating a cost of \$600 million over the next seven years that's directly associated with the Olympics – and \$200 million of that is the contingency cost. In the same seven-year period, your province and your taxpayers will invest over \$75 billion in health care and over \$50 billion in education.

Through that investment in the Olympics, we have the opportunity of creating not just economic activity in Vancouver and Whistler, but in Prince Rupert and the Kootenays.

Have you ever watched the Olympics? They show you an event, and then they show you something that's going on in the province or the state. They show you an event, and then they tell you something about an athlete.

The Kootenays is one of the most exceptional tourism treasures in the world. It is two times the size of Switzerland. It has ski resorts and golf courses and wonderful people, exceptional vistas, marvellous geography. All it needs is a \$13-million expansion to the Cranbrook Airport, and we can liberate all of that economic activity.

Guess what? We're going to make sure they get their \$13-million expansion because that's going to generate jobs, opportunity and hope for British Columbians in that part of the province.

The Olympics gives us huge opportunities to move forward. An economic impact study after the Australian Summer Games showed 6 billion additional dollars went into Australia in tourism the year after the Olympics were held.

Lillehammer, Norway, had a 43 per cent increase in tourism in the four years before the Olympics. As a country with a trading economy offering things to other parts of the world, Norway has really benefited.

In Calgary they generated a \$50-million surplus. In Salt Lake City they generated a \$100-million US surplus. Is there anyone in this room who doesn't think Vancouver can do better than Salt Lake City?

We have enormous opportunities in this province. We have to make some difficult decisions, but those decisions are much easier when you remember the energy, the enthusiasm and the creativity of the people who live here; when you remember what we can accomplish when we put our minds together; when you remember that we can be globally recognized for the leadership role we take; and when you remember that it is possible for British Columbia to stand on the top step of the podium and receive the gold medal for what we do.

We are creative, we are dynamic, we are vital, we are British Columbians and we are going to be number 1. Thank you very much.