

Premier Gordon Campbell
Post referendum press conference
July 3, 2002

Check against delivery

Today's referendum results mark a crucial milestone in the long march towards treaty-making in British Columbia.

After many years of being shut out of the treaty process, the people have finally had their say – and their message to First Nations and to all Canadians is unmistakable.

British Columbians stand firm in their resolve to negotiate workable, affordable treaties that will provide certainty, finality and equality.

They have given their provincial government a clear mandate and a solid set of principles to get on with the task.

And they are ready to forge a new era of reconciliation with First Nations measured not in words or good intentions, but in positive actions and outcomes.

That was the overwhelming message of the 760,000 citizens who cast their ballots in the referendum.

It was the message sent in response to question after question by those who participated in this unprecedented act of direct democracy.

In a minute, the Attorney General will talk about the results in greater detail.

But I want all British Columbians to know that the guidance and direction they have given their provincial negotiators today on each point is crystal clear.

84.5 per cent said “yes” to Question 1 – they agree that private property should not be expropriated for treaty settlements.

92.1 per cent said “yes” to Question 2 – they agree that the terms and conditions of leases and licences should be respected; and fair compensation for unavoidable disruption of commercial interests should be ensured.

On principle after principle, the people's verdict is unmistakable.

93.1 per cent agreed in response to Question 3 that hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities on Crown land should be ensured for all British Columbians.

94.5 per cent agreed that parks and protected areas should be maintained for the use and benefit of all British Columbians.

93.6 per cent agreed that province-wide standards of resource management and environmental protection should continue to apply.

British Columbians also strongly endorsed the position that we have consistently put forward on self-government.

On Question 6, 87.2 per cent agreed that the Provincial Government should adopt the principle that aboriginal self-government should have the characteristics of local government, with powers delegated from Canada and British Columbia.

Similarly, 91.7 per cent agreed on Question 7 that treaties should include mechanisms for harmonizing land use planning between aboriginal governments and neighbouring local governments.

And finally, 90.5 per cent agreed that we should adopt the principle that existing tax exemptions for aboriginal people should be phased out.

The net result is a resounding vote of confidence in both the treaty-making process and the principles that my government will take to the negotiating table on the people's behalf.

To those who did not choose to participate in the referendum, I say, never let it be said you didn't have a chance.

To those who did participate by mailing in their ballots, I say, thank you – that's democracy in action.

For in the end, the point of this vote as with any other is not simply how you voted, or even if you did.

The point is that you could vote – that you had a right to participate and make your voice heard.

As I said, three-quarters-of-a-million British Columbians availed themselves of that opportunity – or nearly 36 per cent of the electorate.

But by any measure, it's a tribute to democracy and to British Columbians' profound interest in this issue that 760,000 citizens took the time to get involved and make their views known.

So now it's up to us – to the people's elected representatives – to use that mandate to reinvigorate the treaty process and redouble our efforts to get results.

That is my aim – and that is my government's commitment.

We have a mission, we have a mandate and we are going to move mountains to see it through.

To all First Nations, in particular, I want you to know – in the months and years to come, you will see that my government will use the mandate given to it by the people to move farther, faster than you ever might have imagined.

We will make tangible progress, not just at the treaty table, but in building capacity and in tackling real needs that must be met now – not in 10 or 20 years' time.

I will have much more to say about how we might achieve those goals in the weeks ahead, following discussions with First Nations leaders.

But now I'd like to ask the Attorney General to take a few minutes to talk more specifically about today's results, before taking questions.