

**Speech to Creston Chamber of Commerce
Premier Gordon Campbell
April 5, 2004**

Check Against Delivery

It's great to be at the Columbia Brewing Company. This is truly a Kootenay success story. This company has contributed enormously to British Columbia - to people's understanding of the province. Not only do they produce a great product, but they have consistently invested in Creston. They spent \$12 million recently and I know that's a lot of money to invest in any town in British Columbia. I want to say thank you for allowing us to come and to use the room and to meet with all of you.

This is the first time I've been in Creston since I was elected Premier. I was in Creston plenty of times before that. I was in Creston when I was working for UBCM. And I was in Creston when I was leader of the opposition. But it's great to come back and meet with people.

Blaire Suffredine has been working very hard on the expansion of the library. I want you to know that because of Blaire, the library board, the local counsel and the people here in Creston that library is going to be expanded. It is going to be done. It is going to take a little bit longer than we wanted, but it's going to happen. I want to thank all of you for the leadership you've shown in that regard.

I arrived here a bit early today. Blaire suggested we grab a cup coffee at one of your bakeries. When we got there there were two women sitting on a bench in front, they said: "Oh, Premier, I want to talk to you about something." I thought to myself: "I know what they're going to say - they're going to say library." So I was all prepared; I had library all prepared. And then, they said something different to me. They said "pool." Evidently the library is now the second thing we've got to do. The pool is now at the top of the list, so we're working on that.

As I've travelled around the province, particularly in the last three or four months, it has become apparent there are two different kinds of towns. There are towns that wish it was like it was 40 years ago. They sometimes ask me: "Why can't it be like it was 40 years ago?" I can't do anything about making it 40 years ago. It's now, and we're going into the future.

There are other towns like your town that think to themselves: Where do we want to be in 15 years - how do we provide the services and the support so that we have the kind of community we want in 15 years?

I visited a second bakery today. A woman there said you need more tourists. I think we can get more tourists here - it's a spectacular town. I looked at your golf course and thought to myself: I've got to go and play there one day. Your area is also part of a great loop - The Selkirk Loop. The Selkirk Loop is a great reason for people from around the

world to visit. One of the things we're talking about for the Spirit of 2010 is what we call ring roads. The Selkirk Loop is a ring road. It can take people through all parts of the province they may not have heard of before. When we market it and brand it a ring road it becomes a destination people want to come to and people want to enjoy.

This same woman also said: "We want to keep our young people here."

Blaire mentioned that we've balanced the budget in British Columbia for this year. There's a lot of work to balance the budget: there's no question about that. I think most people here understand why we have to balance the budget. You can't run your household, you can't run your business, you can't run your province in a deficit position every single year and think that you're going to have the kind of resources you need.

One of the challenges we had was bringing some discipline to B.C.'s finances. We've done that, it's been recognized. We've watched as credit agencies have told us that we're doing a good job. We've watched as Toronto Dominion Bank said other provinces should be watching British Columbia because the discipline and planning we've brought has made a big difference.

We're balancing the budget for totally different reason than what it looks like on the books. We do it because it reduces our cost of borrowing, which is important. When you reduce the cost of borrowing you create additional resources that allow you to invest in things that are important.

We announced in our throne speech this year that we were going to be expanding post-secondary education opportunities by 25,000 seats between now and 2010. When young people graduate from high school they know if they go on and get a postsecondary education they'll add about a million dollars to their lifetime earnings.

We were holding our young people back. We watched in some cases where it took a 92 per cent average to get in to some university programs. Now, just have a look at me. How many of you think that I got a 92 per cent average? I did get into university though, and I think our young kids deserve the same opportunities.

An important component of the additional 25,000 seats was making sure they were distributed throughout the province. We heard from all of our MLAs and we heard from communities across the province. It can't all be in the Lower Mainland. There's a new university in the southern Interior, the UBC in Kelowna. There's a new university in Kamloops.

And I'm pleased to say that we will be adding 700 additional post-secondary spaces right here in the Kootenays by 2010 as well. There will be 450 more seats for the College of the Rockies, including its campus here in Creston and campuses at Cranbrook, Fernie, Golden, Invermere and Kimberley.

It will mean new seats to strengthen already-existing programs in nursing, resident care, home support, adventure and eco-tourism, and building trades. We'll also be adding 250 seats for Selkirk College.

We are going to protect the Kootenay School of the Arts so that it remains open in Nelson. The Kootenay School has been a critical part of our arts training throughout the province and certainly here in the Kootenays. They were facing some very difficult financial challenges so we came to them with a solution, with Blaire working very hard on this as well. I'm pleased to announce that KSA will become part of Selkirk College, allowing it not only to stay open but to become an even stronger asset for the Kootenays.

I want you to understand why the 700-seat addition in the Kootenays is so important. It's estimated that it costs a student about \$6,000 a year to get their education away from where they live. That means when they're getting their degree close to home they're saving \$24,000 - that's a significant savings.

As we go through this, we're seeking not only to make more spaces available but to make the universities responsive to local needs and to local objectives. We think that both Rocky Mountain and Selkirk do a great job of doing that. Those 700 spaces will make a difference to the lives of students here in the Kootenays. It will make a difference to creating the kind of social infrastructure to keep people here in the Kootenays as they build their future.

Creston is a reflection of what the rest of the province will look like in about 15 years. Right now the seniors' population in Creston is almost two times what it is for the national average - 41 per cent of the population of Creston today is over 55.

What can we learn from this? How do we take the challenges you face here and try and create the kind of opportunities for our communities healthy, safe and secure for seniors as they move through their lives.

We need to have additional facilities for seniors, and Creston seniors deserve access to assisted living opportunities so they can stay in their communities. We've known for a long time about the challenge of an aging population.

In fact, when I was mayor, back in the late eighties, we had a program in Vancouver, saying: Ready or not, we're all getting older, and what are we going to do about it? I've got a short answer for what we did about it: not very much.

We have to change the way we think about our communities. For example, 25 years ago when someone said 'aquatic centre,' do you know what the first words out of their mouths would be? Think of how great it would be for the kids.

When I came to Creston, they said 'aquatic centre.' Do you know what the first words that came out of their mouths were? It would be great for our seniors, it's a great low-impact exercise. It's great in terms of taking care of people and making them feel

healthier. There's a real opportunity for us to rethink how we deal with our communities and how we build them.

One of the things we have to do is make sure there are supports for people. There's a continuum of care between when people are feeling comfortable and confident and secure in their homes and when they may have to go into an institutional setting.

Today I'm pleased to tell you that the province will be supporting 21 new assisted living units here in Creston. Those assisted living units will be provided through a partnership with Golden Life Management. They will be investing \$4.8 million to build a new 50-unit facility called Crestview Village. The Interior Health Authority and the B.C. Housing will fund 21 of those assisted living units, enabling seniors to live independently with 24-hour support, meals and housekeeping.

That's on top of the \$4.2 million that Interior Health is investing in the Swan Valley upgrade. That's all because we want to try and create an environment where there's a choice for seniors. For too long there were too few choices for too many seniors, and we knew it. We're going through a transition. It's a challenging transition, but I think that by providing those 21 additional assisted living units and investing in Swan Valley Lodge we're upgrading the supports for seniors in the community. We'll be in a position to learn from this venture. We'll be able to see what's happening in Creston and see how we can adapt them in other communities across the province.

You know we have invested \$282,000 in the library facility. That's a very important facility for us and in fact, an important facility for you. In British Columbia we have launched a major initiative with regard to literacy. Many of us we take our literacy for granted. We think: oh, everyone can read like us. Everyone can't read like us!

We know this, the most important foundation skill you can give to anyone - whether it's a young child or an older person - is the skill of literacy. We've created a Literacy Now program. We'll be working with your library and other libraries across the province to make sure that we provide those literacy tools to everyone in British Columbia. It's our goal to be the most literate province in the country by 2010. In fact a goal agreed on by all the Premiers at the Council of Federation is for Canada to be the most literate country in the world by 2010.

We are going to double the library space. There's going to be 20,000 square feet. We're going to allow for new Internet terminals. We're going to expand learning and literacy opportunities here, not just for Creston but for people throughout the valley. All of those things are going to be important.

You know, and I know, this is a spectacular place to live. We all have responsibilities to husband this resource. We want economic activity to take place, and it does; in forestry, in agriculture, in wineries, and in mining. We believe we can have those activities take place while enhancing, improving, and protecting critical parts of our environment.

One of the reasons people want to come so they can visit you in your communities is that they just want to experience what you sometimes take for granted where you live. We will be investing \$900,000 for habitat conservation projects across the Kootenays.

There will be \$50,000 that will go to the East Kootenay grasslands restoration near Cranbrook. That's including prescribed burns, which is a critical part of the Filmon Report. There's \$200,000 going to the Nature Trust to acquire 4,200 hectares of property near Fairmont Hot Springs to protect grasslands and wetland habitat for threatened wildlife.

There are literally dozens of projects that communities have brought forward, so we're using your tax dollars, that \$900,000, to complement those efforts. Our ability to build the kind of quality of life people want comes from you.

I know that in your valley, and in the Kootenays particularly, people are very, very respectful of the environment we live in. You don't in fact take it for granted. As we develop these community resources - whether it's an assisted living project, a library expansion, or making sure that we protect the environment - we have to do that on the basis of a strong economy. We shouldn't think that the economy isn't important; it actually gives us the tools we need to make sure that we have the resources we need, to provide the services we need.

We laid out a plan in 2000/2001. We've been executing that plan. There are lots of times when it's tough. There's lots of times when it's not particularly fun.

I was talking to Joe, and I said: "How do you like being mayor, Joe?" He said: "Well, there's times when people sort of jump all over you."

I said: "You think that mayor is bad; try being Premier for a while."

The real issue is if you have a plan and have some principles you're building it on, you have to execute it because as soon as you decide that it's not important anymore, it's not hard to lose the whole plan.

We wanted to create jobs in the province. We have. We were #1 in job creation in the country over the past two years. That's important because each one of those jobs provides resources for families. I know there's no question at the chamber. You understand how important jobs and the creation of small businesses are to the development of the province.

We have the highest level of confidence in small business of any province in the country: that's something that, frankly, is a far, far greater tribute to the businesses in British Columbia than it is to the government.

I'm pleased that we're starting to create an environment where people are thinking about their future again.

We have to recognize that there are going to be choices to be made as we create that future. You can choose to be in favour of mining, or you can choose to be opposed to it. I want you to know exactly where we stand: we're in favour of it. We think mining is a critical part of our economic future in British Columbia. Our opposition is not in favour of it: that's their choice. It's citizens who will decide what direction that they want to go.

We are not going to raise people's taxes. In fact, we're going to keep working to try and reduce taxes because we think when you work hard you deserve to keep more money in your paycheque.

There's no such thing as government money; it's all your money. It's all money that you go out and work for, that you give up your life for, and you take time away from your family for. When the government takes that money we have to make sure that we're spending it where you want.

We're spending the majority, 43 per cent of every tax dollar, goes to health care. We're trying to focus it on patients. We're trying to get rid of unnecessary bureaucracy. We're trying to attract doctors and nurses into the province. And we've seen progress with regard to that.

We can only do that with a strong economy.

We support a strong forest economy. Our forests are an incredible natural and economic asset for us, but if we mismanage them, we lose the opportunities they create - not just for us but for the next generation.

Last year, forestry capital investment increased in British Columbia: that's a strong sign; that's a powerful message that we're going in the right direction. That's what creates stability in communities. That's what creates opportunities in communities.

We've seen a substantial increase in energy investment. Coalbed methane is a huge energy opportunity: 90 trillion cubic feet - all of which burns cleaner than natural gas. There's an opportunity there for jobs and for investment and for people all over the province of British Columbia.

The critical thing is to recognize that governments are in place to serve the people. We are here to try and allow people to pursue their goals, to allow communities to set their agenda and to move forward with it, and to do that in a way that's economically viable and sensible.

I want to thank the chamber because the chamber of commerce has laid out some very sound and, I think, thoughtful and forward-looking plans about what we can do in the province and what we have to do to compete.

Let me tell you this: when we ran in 2000-2001, we said we were going to try and bring B.C.'s families home; we were going to try and bring our kids back.

I am really pleased that over the last year, for the first time in six years, we actually had people moving back to British Columbia from the rest of country; 6,200 people moved into British Columbia.

I was in a small town last week, and the mayor said to me: "You know, for the first time in eight years we had a net increase in our population. It was 108 people."

This is what it means. It means: instead of waiting two years to sell your house when you have to move, it's taking three or four days. Instead of wondering whether you can ever sell your house, we're finding that we can, and we can sell it at a price that we're asking or even more.

A lot of that is because of the drive and the commitment of the people in small communities across the province. It's because of your tenacity. It's because of your vision.

I've always enjoyed coming to Creston because you've had good civic leadership, you've had strong commitment in the community, you've had strong business commitment to make sure that you create the kind of future that you enjoy.

You all know that we won; Canada won the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. It's going to be an exceptional opportunity for all of us and for all of our kids. We're going to bring people from all over the world, here to British Columbia. And when we get them here to British Columbia, we're going to bring them to the Creston Valley.

When we get them here and they think of great circle routes - like traveling up the east coast of Vancouver Island and across to Prince Rupert and across Highway 16 and down, along through the Rocky Mountain trench, right to here, and back out, if they want.

So there's only 2,138 days to go until the Olympics, and I want to make sure that your chamber takes advantage of every single day because a day lost is a day that's gone forever.

Let me just close by saying that it is great to be back. It's up to you how you're going to take advantage of the opportunities that are here.

You have a mayor and a council that I've just spent some time with. They've got some great ideas. They're certainly strong voices for Creston and for the Valley. I encourage you to be the same.