

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Mining Association of British Columbia
May 22, 2003

Check Against Delivery

As we celebrate the end of Mining Week and celebrate the great people that are involved in your industry, we're also celebrating what mining means for B.C. – and has meant over the last 150 years.

But more importantly, we want to celebrate what mining can and will be in B.C.'s future if we work together. Twelve thousand people work in the industry today, we want that number to climb.

To achieve that, we have some work to do. You were very clear and the Chamber of Mines has been very clear that we have to have an aggressive policy to bring investment back to B.C.

That starts with an aggressive policy that tries to deliver the services you need in a timely way. During the break, I was talking to a fellow and he said it was taking too long to get his permit through. We need to hear that.

So number one, I want to encourage you to be open and honest and direct with us about what we can do. We won't always agree and we won't always be able to give you everything you want when you want it, but it starts with you telling us what you need.

Prior to the last election you were very clear. You said we had to change our tax regime in our province. You told us to get rid of the Corporate Capital Tax, and we got rid of it.

You told us to get rid of the tax on machinery and equipment, and we got rid of it. You told us our income taxes were too high, and we lowered them. You told us your suppliers needed more support, and we changed the way we were taxing small businesses.

We've introduced a total of 27 tax relief measures over the last two years. I don't want to tell you that we've finished that job, but what you need to do is highlight the critical components of our tax regime that are still causing you problems.

None of us like to pay taxes, but we have to have some taxes to deliver the public services people want. We're always going to have some taxes, but they should be sensible, fair and encourage investment.

You also told us before the last election that there were real problems with access to the land base. We know that, and we've been working very hard over the last couple of years to build a framework that will allow you to be certain where you can go and carry out mining and mineral exploration.

I know you've had some concerns about the proposed working forest. But the working forest land base is not just about encouraging forestry in the province, it's about encouraging mining activity in the province. It's about ensuring that we have an economic land base that is available for people and for industry – a land base where you can create some certainty for people so they can go out and take some risks and succeed.

You told us prior to the last election that we had to start dealing with the issues of First Nations in an open and direct way. We have started doing that.

Literally dozens of agreements have been reached with First Nations to help us build capacity in First Nations communities and to help them to access the opportunities that exist for them in mining, in energy development, and in forestry.

If we build a relationship of trust with our First Nations, we know we will have an economic future that is ripe with potential and opportunity, and that is exactly what we are trying to do.

I want to thank the industry for the work that you do to help us accomplish that goal. British Columbia is a province that is there for everyone. We should all remember that this province is far more successful when we think of the province as one place – not as the Lower Mainland or the Peace Country or the Kootenays or the Chilcotin, but as one province that has something to offer when we work with one another, we learn from one another and we move forward together.

We've done a number of things you suggested, but I won't pretend for a minute that we have finished the journey. I do think we have started to take the steps that are necessary to try and build the confidence we need to build the confidence you need.

The highest paid average jobs in the province are in the mining industry. Those folks are building communities, and they built our province. Where would our province be without the mining industry? We can't forget that history.

We want to continue to build on that tradition and those values. When you have mines whose economic values have run out they close down, and there are major changes that take place when that happens.

Just think of the community of Kimberley and what they have gone through as their mine closed after almost a hundred years of productivity, a hundred years of jobs, a hundred of community support.

They have actually done a pretty good job trying to deal with that transition, but you and I know that over the last decade too many mines closed in British Columbia and not enough mines opened up.

Someone said to me that it takes ten years from when we discover something that might be an economically viable mineral deposit to when we have a chance to get going on it.

Ten years is too long to take if we're going to encourage activity in the mining industry again.

One of the things we've tried to do is get rid of the duplication of the processes that are placed on you by governments that are there to serve you.

One of the things that our new Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines, Sheila Wynn, did is she worked very hard with the feds to bring those two processes together so instead of a provincial process followed by a federal process we're able to shrink that timeline down. We're working on that in all sorts of areas in government to make sure that happens. But even to get there you have to have the kind of exploration that's required.

We saw a 25% increase in exploration activity between 2001 and 2002. We went from about \$32 million that was invested in exploration to about \$40 million, and we are hoping that we are going to increase that \$40 million to \$60 million this year. That's significant, but if we're honest with ourselves we will recognize it's not good enough.

We have to get up to the \$200 million mark in exploration if we're going to have a healthy and sustainable industry that people can commit to in the long term. That's our goal.

Tonight I can tell you that we are prepared to invest in enhancing our geoscience programs to entice companies to explore in the province. The recent geophysical survey in southeastern B.C. leveraged about \$10 of investment for every \$1 the government spent to complete the survey.

To build on that result, we're going to launch a new two-year program we're calling Rocks to Riches. In partnership with the industry, the federal government and First Nations, The Rocks to Riches program will develop enhanced geoscience surveys in under-explored areas to showcase B.C.'s mineral potential.

Our government is committing \$2 million to these geoscience programs in central and northern B.C., including \$1.1 million to the B.C. and Yukon Chamber of Mines to deliver geoscience surveys. I want to thank the Chamber for working with us on this. The remaining \$950,000 will go to targeted geoscience initiatives administered by Natural Resources Canada.

We want exploration activity to take place to help revitalize B.C.'s mining industry. And I want to ask you all tonight to continue telling us what else we have to do to make that happen. There are some that you have identified that we are working on today, and we have to continue to build the momentum for change that we're after.

We watched the industry slip through the late 80's and 90's, and it's going to take an awful lot of work and effort to make sure that it turns around.

This is a spectacular province, and we have the people we need to develop our mines in a way that is environmentally sustainable, and in a way that is economically viable and that helps revitalize our whole economy.

Mining is a critical part of our plan for the future of British Columbia. It is a crucial part of our plan for the future of the heartlands of our province. It's a critical part for the northwest and the Peace, for the Kootenays and for Vancouver Island.

British Columbia deserves to be a mining leader. We have the talent in this room to do that. You have a government that is committed to working with you, to learning from you and to delivering on the promise that mining has had in British Columbia in the past and will certainly have if we work together to build a brighter future.