

Premier Gordon Campbell
Opening Remarks at Quesnel Small Business Round Table
May 3, 2002

Check Against Delivery

I used to have a small business, much longer ago than I care to remember. When I was elected mayor of Vancouver in 1987, I sold it so the people who were working with me didn't get punished because I happened to be in politics.

I appreciate you all taking the time today to come to the first of a series of roundtable discussions.

British Columbia is different from the rest of the country in lots of ways. One of them is that a higher percentage of our economy is small business than the national average: Almost 60 per cent of our economy is generated by small business, and so are a huge number of jobs.

We have a different approach to small business than the previous government did. Their small business strategy was to take a big business and let it shrink over a period of a decade. Ours is to take small businesses and – hopefully – get them to grow over a period of a decade. We've done things in the last 11 months to help, but we have a long way to go before we have completed the task.

One of the reasons we decided to do go around the province and hear from folks is to find out what is bothering you in your day-to-day lives. There may be things that are ministry-specific; some may be general government policy.

I'll give you an example of something I'm sure is bothering most people. Last year the WCB had a deficit of \$287 million. When that happens, they come to the employer and they say, "Give us more money." I haven't heard anyone saying they think they're spending too little on WCB, so we've got some big challenges to face.

The income tax reductions we did last year, the corporate capital tax elimination that will have taken place by September 1st of this year, the removal of tax on machinery and equipment, and the changes in the tax structure for the so-called luxury vehicle (which we used to call the truck tax) are all aimed encouraging small business.

We have a regulatory reform under way. We have eliminated 4,000 regulations so far – which sounds like a big number until you recognize that there were 400,000 regulations in British Columbia imposed on the economy, costing about \$5 billion.

Within the next four weeks we will introduce at least the first stage of changes to the WCB legislation. We will be doing some changes to Employment Standards. There will be additional changes to the Labour Code. We will have to do more, but we want to get started on what are fairly onerous tasks.

To give you an example, the WCB has 35,000 regulations in their legislative and regulatory regime. The Forest Practices Code has over 10,000; employment standards has over 5,000.

We obviously still have lots to do. In the last budget we increased the small business tax threshold to \$300,000 from its previous \$200,000. That makes us competitive with most of the country, but we want to be more competitive.

As we go through the next three years, we want to make sure we're making progress each year. We think we've made progress in the last 11 months, but we would like to make progress in the next 12 to 13 months as well. This is an opportunity for you to tell us what you would like us to focus on.

We believe small business is the engine for the economy; it's the engine for building new prosperity. Today we're here to listen and to discover the things we can do to make your lives a little easier.