

College of the Rockies Expansion

Premier Gordon Campbell

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Check Against Delivery

Thank you all for being here today. It's a particular pleasure to be here with Nick Rubidge, president of College of the Rockies. Thank you very much for joining us today.

You know, the College of the Rockies is a very important educational institution for the entire East Kootenays region. One of the things that we've tried to do over the last number of years is build the support and the educational foundations so that everyone has the opportunity to pursue their professional goals and objectives. We want, and now have, a strong economy, but a strong economy requires having a workforce at the ready with the necessary and appropriate skills and education to meet its demands.

In the last three and a half years we've created almost 200,000 jobs in the province. Those jobs create opportunities, most of which require additional training. So one of the things we've undertaken in the province is expanding B.C.'s educational infrastructure. For example, last April we agreed to add 450 new student spaces to the College of the Rockies. That was an important initiative for everyone in the East Kootenays and, indeed, in the southern part of British Columbia.

We're here in Cranbrook today to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Congratulations to all of Cranbrook for a hundred years of community services. We're also celebrating the College of the Rockies' 30th anniversary; these two events are an excellent opportunity for everybody to get together and celebrate what has been accomplished in this region in the last century and in the last three decades.

In the 30 years the college has expanded; its outreach has also expanded. There are now seven campuses, seven institutions with 2,500 full-time students getting the opportunities they want here at the College of the Rockies.

Today I'm pleased to tell all of you here that the province will be investing \$15.4 million in capital funding to support the expansion of the Cranbrook campus.

It is critical, I think, that the expansion happens here in Cranbrook. We are going to be expanding trades training facilities because we know that trades are a critical part of B.C.'s -- and certainly of Cranbrook's -- economic future. Having enough people skilled in the trades is integral to a strong economy because let's face it, a construction boom is only possible when there are enough skilled people to work in it. A 'revitalized forestry industry' is only a phrase without trained professionals out on the job every day breathing the life back into it.

The Cranbrook expansion will provide new shop space for programs like heavy-duty commercial transport mechanics, carpentry and timber framing. The number of apprentices in Cranbrook has doubled in the last two years, driven by the construction and economic boom here. Even knowing that B.C.'s economy is a tiger again, I was still amazed to see some of the numbers for Cranbrook: Housing starts are up by 364 percent since 2001; the number of business incorporations is up 13 percent. Throughout the East Kootenays, opportunities are opening up in forestry, mining, tourism, and agriculture. The expanded training programs will help meet the growing demands of Cranbrook's industries.

To also help meet these demands, the College of the Rockies launched two new programs in electrical trades in 2005. Being able to take those programs here instead of in the Lower Mainland reduces the costs apprentices and employers face by 75 percent. This kind of educational cost-cutting is critical to ensuring that everyone has the chance to study or be trained in the field of their choice.

We are also providing expanded academic space -- new classrooms, a 36-seat nursing lab, new study areas, a conference room, an IT room and offices. It's a 4,800-square-metre structural expansion that will house all 450 new seats being created at the College of the Rockies between now and 2010.

Under the leadership of your president and as a result of the commitment from the College, the College is adding \$1.14 million to the expansion that is dedicated to building new spaces for student services and the student association.

That highlights what this is really about. This is not an investment in the College of the Rockies -- it's an investment in people. It's an investment in the students that will come to the College of the Rockies to become professionals; it's about those new professionals taking their expertise back to their communities so that their friends and family and neighbors can benefit from what they have to offer.

People are truly the bricks and mortar of a strong foundation for the future, both socially and economically. Our government's commitment today combined with the College's contribution means that \$16.5 million is being invested in creating opportunities for people throughout the East Kootenay and Kootenay regions.

So, congratulations to everyone who worked so hard to make this funding happen. Congratulations to all the students, current and future, who will turn this funding into rewarding careers and strong, vibrant communities throughout the Kootenays -- communities like Cranbrook with a rich histories and dynamic futures.

Thank-you.