

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Asia Pacific Foundation
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Check Against Delivery

I want to start by saying how important the Asia Pacific Foundation is. Now more than ever we have to strengthen the bonds of community. We have to strengthen the bonds of openness, trade and culture because that's what is going to strengthen the world and lead us to a stronger and a brighter future for everybody.

It's been a long time since I travelled to Asia. But the last time I was there, there was still a hunger for people to understand what was happening in the province of British Columbia.

I'm pleased that after the eight years since I was there, I am able to report that British Columbia is healing and on the road to recovery. Those of you who know this province are going to be glad because we've got nothing but a bright future ahead of us. We've got a tough number of months, but there's never been a time when leadership has been easy.

Is there anyone in this room who can remember when they were leading – whether it was in your corporation, institution or university – where it seemed like it was a piece of cake, it didn't take anything, there were no risks involved?

I can tell you British Columbia wants to lead. British Columbia is ready to be bold and British Columbians themselves are ready to be put to the test. They are ready to be put to the test that says, "It's time we created a future that our young people can be excited about – where our businesses and investors can see that they can build the kind of success that they want and not have it confiscated."

We have a province that is open for business. We are ready for business and we are going to serve business because we know that that's how we are going to support the critical public services that are essential to the quality of peoples' lives in British Columbia.

None of us in this room can pretend that we know how our world is going to unfold in the days, weeks and months ahead. But we all can know this: if we stay focused on our values, if we stay committed to the fundamentals that have made our communities great, we will get through these difficult times and create even better times in the days ahead.

It's difficult at a time like this for us to see through the volatility and uncertainty. But I encourage everybody in our province and country to recognize that we have an important role to play as we move forward to build a stronger, more united, more cosmopolitan, more understanding and indeed more peaceful world for the future.

We won't be able to do that if we don't stand on some of the principles that have made our country great. And one of the principles that has made Canada great place is that we've been a welcoming home for people from all over the world. There is nothing that's made me prouder as a citizen of Vancouver, as Mayor, and as Premier of British Columbia, than to recognize the diversity of the province in which we live, and the strength and the richness that gives every British Columbian in thousands of ways that we never stop to count.

So I want to talk to you about what our province is intending to do and how we hope to be able to do it. When I talk about what the province can do, I'm inviting all of you to be part of that. Because the province is nothing if it's not each and every one of you carrying out your actions on a day to day basis in your businesses, in your universities, in your colleges, in your institutions. We want to create a framework that allows you to be as creative, as dynamic, as driven and innovative as you want to be and we want to be there celebrating your successes with you.

We have a great asset in British Columbia and that is our social diversity. We speak all of the languages of the world right here. We have to start recognizing that's an asset that we can build on. What better place for people to invest than the province of British Columbia. You're not going to find a better place in Canada and I don't believe you're going to find a better place in the world.

We've recognized the most important part of any economy in the next decade is people. It's individuals, it's what they learn, it's what workers can do, and it's how we liberate the people of our province so they can pursue their goals and objectives. And it's recognizing that when they go out and work hard, they should be rewarded. I don't know anyone who says, "I'm glad to work hard and I don't need any rewards." They may not be financial rewards but they need to know they get some benefits from doing that.

So when we were elected and we cut personal income tax, we did that for a reason. We want people to know when they come to this province that if they're willing to work hard, to commit to an idea, to focus on the results they want, they're going to get ahead and their government is not going to confiscate their energy and their activity.

Today in the province of British Columbia we have the lowest base rate of personal income tax of any jurisdiction in our country for the bottom two-tax brackets. By next January we'll have the second lowest marginal income tax rate. And when people stand up today and say, "you know, you were wrong – maybe you shouldn't have made those tax cuts," I can tell you now more than ever we have to give people the benefits of their labour and their work, and we're going to keep doing that in British Columbia.

In 1993 I visited Hong Kong, and went to a series of meetings. There wasn't a single meeting where the first question that was put to me as Mayor of Vancouver wasn't, "What on Earth are they doing in the province of British Columbia with their Corporate Capital Tax? How can you tell us you want our investment but you're going to tax our investment?"

In British Columbia we have eliminated half of the Corporate Capital Tax and by next September there will be no Corporate Capital Tax on investments because we want investment in British Columbia.

We have cut our Corporate Income Tax as well. We think it's time for corporations to know that they can get a return on their investment. We're not afraid of a return on your investment. In fact we encourage it. We want you to do well and we're going to keep moving in that direction.

We've eliminated the taxes on machinery and equipment because those taxes were taxes on productivity. We want a productive economy. We want a private sector driven economy. We want an economy that encourages people to come here and work, where our young people say this is their home, this is where they want to build their future and where we attract capital from around the world. That's what British Columbia's aim is, and what we intend to succeed in achieving.

To do that, we need your help. We need the help to build the markets that are there for us if we just go and respond to them. You know far better than me the opportunities that are available to you in every corner of the Asia Pacific. These are opportunities we cannot take for granted. We have to go and develop them. We have to respond to the institutional as well as the societal needs of our customers because when we do, we will strengthen our society and our community as well.

When you think about the connections that we have with Asia already, it really is phenomenal. It is an enormous asset that we want to continue to build on. In 2000 alone there were 16 million passengers and 252,000 metric tons of cargo that went through the Vancouver International Airport from Asia. We had 76.6 million tons of cargo and one million cruise ship passengers come through our port.

We had triple the amount of trade with the Asia Pacific that the rest of the country had. I want to increase that to six times the amount of the rest of the country, because that's how much better we are than the rest of the country in serving the needs, the goals and the dreams of the Asia Pacific.

Seventeen percent of our population has direct connections and family ties with the Asia Pacific. Can you imagine having that kind of asset in your business and not taking advantage of it? Can you imagine not listening to the ways we can build on that asset?

When we go to Japan, one of our largest economic contributors and partners, we have to understand that in spite of the tough time that Japan is in right now – and the fact that they are going to have to work their way through their problems just as British Columbia will have to work our way through our provincial problems – their economy *will* turn around. And British Columbia will have been there in the good times, in the difficult times, and the better times yet to come. That's what the goal is that we've set for ourselves in building our relationship with Japan.

When I go to the World Economic Summit in Hong Kong at the end of this month I intend to reach out not just to our friends from the Asia Pacific but from around the world and say, “Our province is ready. We are open, we want to work with you, we want to serve your needs.”

I’m going to have an opportunity to visit China. There is an enormous housing boom going on in China. Everybody here knows that one of the most important commodities in building a house is wood. So I’m going to go to China and make sure that we have access to those markets, and that they have building codes that allow us to make sure that we put our wood into China. Because when we do that, we give them something and we benefit from it as well. We have access to China’s market, and they can build safe, secure housing.

We’re also spending a lot more time worrying about the Softwood Lumber Agreement with the United States. That is having a huge impact on thousands of peoples’ lives. We shouldn’t have illusions – every one of us is going to be affected by what’s happening as a result of the Softwood Lumber Agreement.

Our government’s going to do everything we can to mitigate the damage of the Softwood Lumber Agreement, to move forward to a new world of more competitive forest policy, and make sure that people in our forest industry have long term, sustainable and stable work.

We can solve the Softwood Lumber Agreement – we have to for the long term. But if we really want to make sure that we don’t face those problems in the future, we have to build other markets. We think there’s an enormous market to be built in the Asia Pacific and we want to work with the Asia Pacific’s economies and institutions to make sure we do that. Because that makes sense for British Columbia *and* for the Asia Pacific.

When you think of some of the economic assets we have, we have one of the cleanest, safest, most secure energy resources in the world.

In terms of building new industry, we have global leaders in technology. Our government is welcoming investment here in British Columbia, so that whether it’s Electronic Arts, PMC Sierra, or QLT Technologies, we know that we have a technology industry that’s ready to thrive. We have universities, colleges and research institutes that are ready to continue to provide the research, talent and skills they need to proceed and prosper. We have all the assets we need to move forward. All we have to do is have our vision focused on where we want to go. All we have to think about is what the results are that we want.

I don’t want to leave anyone with any illusions – it’s going to take a lot of work for us to get there. I can’t promise you that there are not going to be tough times. But if we focus and build on our assets, if we open ourselves up to accept the new ideas, innovation, imagination and energy of people from all around the Asia Pacific, and if we build on the strength of our social infrastructure, we will succeed.

We are very fortunate in this province, in spite of the difficult times that are ahead of us. As we make choices about how to get our financial house in order provincially, about how to build a tourism industry that's thriving and healthy, about how to make sure that our energy industry is reaching its full potential, one of the things that we have to remember is that the critical part of those economies is the people who make them work.

If we can make software developers in India comfortable with what we're doing in British Columbia, so we have regular exchange and we're building on their talents, we will do better than if we try and proceed by ourselves.

If we can make entrepreneurs in Hong Kong understand that this is a place to invest in virtually any endeavour – whether it's in communications technology, entertainment technology, wireless technology – where they can come and build a workforce that provides access to new markets for them, that's all the better.

If we can ensure our friends in the Philippines understand that this is an economy that can work to their benefit as well as our benefit – if we can make sure that people from Japan or Taiwan understand that this is an open economy that encourages investment, that we're willing to build a future together with them – then I believe we have a very bright future indeed ahead of us.

One of the things that we should take strength from is the diversity of our culture, the strength of our friends and the bonds that we've built across the Asia Pacific, where families and friends are connected. When we think about the Asia Pacific and what we can accomplish if we work together, there is nothing that can hold us back.

I want to leave you with this quote: “Whatever we can do or dream we can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” Let's be bold. Let's build the dream. British Columbia is ready and we need your help. Thank you very much.