

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Vancouver Board of Trade
October 1st, 2001

Check Against Delivery

I had a chance to speak with the Board of Trade on March 12th. It seems like a long, long time ago! On March 12th I said I was seeking your support for a plan that would take our province forward – that would make sure that our province was assuming its true leadership role in our country again.

I know there were lots of people who wondered whether that would take place. But I want to tell you, in spite of what happened on September 11th, I still have confidence in the province of British Columbia, in the people who live here, that we are going to get through this thing, and we are going to make this province number one in the country and an example for the world.

I know a lot of you were planning to come to the lunch on September 11th. That day was a day that all of us will remember and will be dealing with for some time to come.

It's easy for us to lull ourselves into a sense that somehow history is something that happens to other generations. That the struggle for freedom and security and democracy has been won for all time. That the fight for peace is something that others must do because we live in a peaceful society. On September 11th we found that nothing could be further from the truth. History is happening to us. The struggle for freedom, security, the rule of law and democracy is our ongoing responsibility.

To live in peace we must guard it with all of our might. It's what we do, what you do and what I do. It's what we do to respond to those that attacks of September 11th, to that threat to our way of life which will lead to the judgment in the future as to whether or not we've measured up to our responsibilities.

I have no doubt that British Columbians, Canadians, citizens of the world who believe in democracy, the rule of law, freedom and liberty will measure up at this time of crisis and this time of need.

For Canadians, we face a very clear choice. We can choose to work closely with our American friends to seal off our continent, to protect the people who live in our countries. Or, we can allow the American government to draw a line at the 49th parallel. We can choose to super-safeguard our airports, and our ocean ports and our borders, or lose the opportunities of freedom of movement and access that we've had for generations. We can see new barriers put up to the flow of goods as well as the flow of people.

In Canada we should understand that we have a way of life that is the envy of the world, and it is something that we can and we must protect.

But one of the primary ways that we guard the quality of life for the people of Canada is to make sure that they live in secure and safe communities in a secure and safe country. We will be relentless in our pursuit of that goal and that objective.

I was very pleased today that Hugo Llorens is here, the Consul General for the United States. He's worked closely with British Columbia, with our government and with your board to make sure that the relationships that we've built up over generations are strengthened. I want to say thank you for the work and the time and the effort that he's put in the last three weeks as we've struggled to cope with the challenges that confront us all. Hugo, thank you very much.

The future can still be bright. We are still a beacon of hope and opportunity for the rest of the world. We should fast-track our efforts to unlock and unclog our borders, to reopen the fast lanes to the south, to make sure that trade and mobility of people is happening as it used to happen. Because that is the way to show those people who took those actions on September 11th that they have not won – that we are going to win and we will not let them deter us in our task.

Those north-south arteries that we have between Canada and the United States, from the Maritimes to the Pacific, are the economic lifeblood of our community and our country. \$359 billion of trade flows between Canada and the United States. The trade activity that takes place between the customs in Windsor and Detroit is greater than the trade activity between the United States and any other country in the world.

Today we have truckers and manufacturers in Ontario lining up for 30 hours to get through the border. We have fishermen from the Maritimes who are having difficulty providing their produce down into the United States. We have loggers in British Columbia who are worried about the open trade between Canada and the United States.

\$6.8 billion a year flows from British Columbia to the United States in softwood alone, and \$2.6 billion a year in pulp and paper. There is not one of us who will not be touched if we do not ensure that open access between Canada and the United States is maintained. We must dedicate ourselves to that. We must ensure that takes place, because that is one of the things that defines our quality of life and the spirit of Canada, and it is something that we will not let die in light of September 11th. It is a time for leadership, friendship and common sense.

I said last week that British Columbia was ready to do its part. I meant it. I have been in touch with premiers across our country. I will be visiting with the Prime Minister this month, and I will take the message that we are ready. We are ready to open the borders, to provide security and to make sure that our continent is sealed off from the terror and the death that was visited upon it on September 11th. If we work together we will succeed. If we work together we will win.

One of the things that is important for us to remember is the values we had in August and July are the same values that we have today. The goals that we reached for must be the same goals that we reach for today.

If there's anything that September 11th reminds us of, it's that it is the fundamentals that have shaped our country that are critical for us to protect: fundamentals of family, freedom of movement, freedom of opportunity, freedom of religion, freedom of expression – all of those things are critical to build the kind of future that we want.

We have a country that's an open society, and invites people to share in our society – Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, we don't mind. We welcome it. We celebrate it. It creates a richness and diversity that has helped define our nation and created in Canada a beacon for the rest of the world. We cannot lose those freedoms and those foundations as we struggle with the aftermath of September 11th. We will not lose those foundations as we build the future that our children deserve.

For us to have the confidence that we need, we must be relentless in our pursuit of the principles that we've established. I'm very proud of the people who were elected with me on May 16th and came to office at the beginning of June. Because I remember saying to you at the Board of Trade speech in March that we would do what we said we would do. And each and every one of them has been true to that word.

I'm pleased that I have so many members of our caucus here with me today, and I'd just like to quickly introduce them. Sindi Hawkins, MLA for Kelowna-Mission; Stan Hagen, MLA for Comox Valley; Dave Hayer, MLA for Surrey-Cloverdale; Val Roddick from Delta South; Patrick Wong from Vancouver-Kingsway; Ken Stewart from Maple Ridge-Mission; and Linda Reid from Richmond East are all with us today, and I want to say thank you to them for the work, time and effort that they've put in to help turn British Columbia around.

When I visited you before I said to you we had a 90-day agenda. And there were a whole bunch of people that said, "They'll never do it." We did it. Every single one of the items in the 90-day agenda has been complete, and we are moving forward now to build a stronger and a brighter future for the province of British Columbia.

Ipsos Reid did a poll in the summer. Three-quarters of the respondents said they thought the recent provincial election would help move British Columbia in the right direction. But there was a much more significant finding, one that's very important for us to remember as we go through the months ahead of us: 89% of the people of British Columbia wanted to see major or moderate changes in how the government acted.

In the management of the province's finances, 94% wanted change, and 71% of the public wanted major change. 89% of our residents said they thought it would be a good idea for BC to have the lowest tax rate for the bottom two tax brackets. And within 24 hours of being elected, British Columbians from every part of this province had a 25% reduction in their taxes so we now have the lowest base rate of tax for the bottom two tax brackets in the province of British Columbia.

Now you will have heard recently that there are some people who think those tax cuts didn't make sense. Can you imagine being a union leader who said, "I don't think it's a good idea for my members to have \$2,000 more a year in their pockets"?

Would all the trade unionists of British Columbia who don't want \$2,000 in their pockets please put up your hand? So far I've found two of them: David Chudnovsky and Jim Sinclair. And Finance Minister Gary Collins is setting up a special account for them so we'll be able to keep their \$4,000 there in the province.

Just think about this for a minute: for workers across this province, the average annual take-home pay has dropped \$1,700 over the decade of NDP rule. We have to turn that around. We want to watch workers' salaries in this province go up and their take-home pay go up, because we know that those dollars are stronger in their pockets than they are when they're sent to government.

They're going to spend those dollars, and as they spend those dollars, our economy is going to grow. And make no mistake about it, those tax cuts already have saved jobs in British Columbia and have helped new jobs grow in British Columbia, and that's the direction our provincial economy wants to go – growth, opportunity and jobs for the people who live here.

There are people today who say things changed on September 11th, and that's correct. But as I said to you earlier this year, if things are tougher we're going to have to do more. And no one is exempt. There is no sector of the economy that should be exempt as we move to create the foundations to build the future for the people of this province.

When you see a balance sheet like we inherited from the NDP, that will create a deficit between \$3 and \$5 billion over the next couple of years if we don't do something, is there anyone who thinks we should not act? Is there anybody who says "don't act now," who really believes it's all right to impose another \$3-\$5 billion of debt on future generations?

For those who say "don't act now," are there any of them who think we should not take the savings that's available when we find that there's waste in government, and when we find we can deliver a service more cost-effectively? Is there any citizen who says, "Don't worry about my tax dollars, just keep spending them the way you want"?

It seems to me we have an obligation to make sure those dollars we take out of our citizens' pockets are spent in the most cost-effective way possible. It doesn't matter whether you're a carpenter or work in a supermarket or a government office, whether you're a professional or an executive, you work *hard* to get your paycheque. It seems to me it's time for us to have a government that understands that's your money, it's your worth, it's your life. We want to have a government that respects that effort and makes sure every dollar we take out of a taxpayer's pocket is spent in the most cost-effective and sensible way possible. That's our goal, and it's what we intend to deliver.

I'm the first to admit we have a difficult time ahead of us. The week after the stock market opened in the United States after September 11th, we lost a trillion dollars in equity markets. A trillion dollars is the Gross Domestic Product for the entire country of Canada. A trillion dollars is all of the provincial governments' budgets in Canada for three years. It's an enormous mountain that we have to climb.

But I am confident if we stick to our principles, and to what we believe in, we can overcome that. We said to you as we sought your support that we were going to reduce income tax – we did that. We said it was time to encourage investment in the province of British Columbia, and we started doing that as we've begun the phase-out of the Corporate Capital Tax, which will be gone by the end of next year, so people know there's no penalty for investing in our province. When you invest there are jobs, when there are jobs there is hope and a private sector that flourishes.

We said we should encourage productivity, and we've done that by eliminating the sales tax on machinery and equipment. We said we should reduce corporate income taxes so we can be competitive with other jurisdictions, and we are doing that. We said we wanted to start restoring our mining industry in British Columbia so we can get jobs coming back into that industry instead of leaving, and we're trying to do that by boosting the flow-through to 20% for the mining tax credits.

We're doing exactly what we said before the election. We believe in a free enterprise economy; we believe in protecting health care and focusing those resources on patients. We believe in an excellent public education system that will focus the resources on students. We believe in that, and we intend to deliver on that commitment to you and every other citizen of this province.

The incredible thing about this is, it works. In 1991, the Gross Domestic Product for British Columbia was \$81.8 billion, and for Alberta was \$72 billion. In 2001, the Gross Domestic Product for our province was \$130 billion, and in Alberta \$158 billion. We've lost a lot of ground in the last decade, but we're going to gain ground in the next decade, and 10 years from now British Columbia will have surpassed Alberta and we'll be leading this county again in economic activity, in job creation and hope for the people who live here.

We said to you in the election that we were tired of British Columbia having the highest youth unemployment of any jurisdiction west of Quebec. Imagine our province with all of its resources, with all of its talent, with all of the energy of the people who live here, and we have the highest youth unemployment west of Quebec. We told you we were going to focus on creating job opportunities for young people and we're going to do just that. This fall we will have the two ministers responsible bring forward a program that will make sure British Columbia's youth have job opportunities and choices so they can stay here and build a future that they want in the province of British Columbia.

We told you we were going to carry out deregulation – we've already started that. We've started a major review of the WCB to make sure that it takes care of injured workers and the employers who pay the costs, that it's accountable and delivers the results we want. We've had people tell us, "You can't do it – it's not possible to accomplish those goals and objectives." I want all of you to know that it is possible, and we will meet our goals because we know that regulation is the hidden tax that kills jobs and opportunities across this province.

I want to talk to you briefly about a couple of critical issues that are in front of us. The first one is obviously the economy.

When you look at what's happening in the private-sector economy across the world, we are in for some difficult times that will have a huge impact on British Columbia. The Softwood Lumber Agreement has hit us as we've gone through the last few months, and there are thousands of British Columbians today who are laid off as a result of the problems we're facing there.

Mike de Jong, our Minister of Forests, and Don Wright, our Deputy Minister, are working diligently to make sure that British Columbia takes the lead with regard to that. We know how important forestry is to British Columbia, and we will be relentless in our pursuit of open access to American markets, to make sure that our workers are at work delivering a product and the quality that American consumers deserve. We can do it – we will do it. It will take time, but we will get there.

It is very difficult as you look at what's happening in the world today for us to see to the bright future that we have in this province. But we are going to have a competitive, sustainable, exemplary forest industry in this province. An industry that encourages private-sector investment, that delivers on productivity, and that recognizes the huge and valuable resource that we have.

I know that it will be difficult as we go through, but I can tell you British Columbia is leading now. We are leading with Mr. Pettigrew from the federal government; we are this week in negotiations and discussions with the Americans. We want them to understand how our industry works; we want them to understand how their consumers benefit. I can tell you our forest industry will be part of rebuilding BC's economy, just as it's part of rebuilding the American economy in the wake of September 11th.

We face an enormous challenge across our country: we have to change how people think about the services that we deliver. As citizens, you have a right to demand results for the investment that you make.

We've told you that we are going to focus our health-care dollars on patients. We intend to do that. The Premiers in August have accepted responsibility for leading the country in creating a health-care system that's both sustainable and delivers patients the care they need in a timely manner. We have to tear down the intellectual barriers that we've created around delivering a health-care system that meets patients' needs – not a provincial government's needs, or the federal government's needs, but a health-care system that meets your needs and the needs of your families, regardless of where you live.

Over the next number of months we will have health hearings across the province where we will have the opportunity to hear from people about their solutions to the problems we face. There is a special meeting of Premiers in January so that we can move forward with recommendations to improve the health-care system.

It's time for us to refocus the resources that we commit to health care to *patient* care. That's what we intend to do. It will require change, it will require difficult decisions, but I want you to understand this: in British Columbia with a BC Liberal Government, patients come first.

I want to mention one other area that has created uncertainty in the past, and that I believe we are going to find ways we can move forward to create the kind of confidence we need in our province and economy. And that has to do with treaty-making.

We all need to make sure that we understand that treaties are an essential part of the economic future of British Columbia. Over the last four months, the leaders of the First Nations Summit, all of whom are involved in treaty-making, have been working very hard with the government to ensure that we understand the goals and objectives that they have. To create the kind of relationship that's based on trust and openness, and that's essential if we're to deal with these challenging issues that are ahead of us.

As a government, we've divided treaty-making into the Attorney General Ministry, and services to aboriginal communities into the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. We all have to understand that whether it's health care or economic opportunity, whether it's education or social development, aboriginal communities are exactly the same as other communities – they need those services now.

We've failed them in the past. We intend to not fail them in the future. By working with our aboriginal leaders in their communities, we can start improving the quality of life in the day-to-day lives of aboriginal families across this province. We intend to do that, we want to work with you on that and we know that our aboriginal leaders will work with us on that.

As we reach out to British Columbians and involve them in our referendum, I think that's an opportunity to build unity of purpose and understanding. It's an opportunity for us to recognize the great endeavour that we have in front of us and to share in the solution as we move forward. British Columbians want treaties. They want treaties that work. They want treaties that are fair and equitable and create the same sense of hope and opportunity in our aboriginal communities as they experience in their communities. This spirit of generosity in our province is exceptional, and people are going to work to be part of the solution. And that will provide a brighter future for British Columbia as well.

As we look at our province and the world that we live in, remember and enjoy the blessings we have. I can't tell you how fortunate I feel to be a Canadian and a British Columbian, to live in this great province with all of its assets and attributes.

As we go through difficult times, let us never forget this: we do live in the best province in the best country in the world. As we come to our province, as we think of the assets that our province has, we should think of the history of our province. Through great times and difficult times the people of British Columbia have always persevered. They have always been willing to work, to share, to sacrifice, willing to commit to one another and the strength of their communities.

We live in a province of great beauty. Some people called it Magic Mountain, some called it Gold Mountain, others simply said there's no place on Earth like it – it's God's Country. I know we face difficult times, but I know that we have exceptional people who live here. People with talent, with principle, people who are willing to share their dreams with one another.

So today I ask all of you to remember as we move forward that we will do much more when we move together. We will do much better when we stand on the foundations which have made this province and this country such a great place and such a beacon of hope and opportunity for people around this world. I know that you will be there helping, leading, taking us forward. I want you to know that my government will be there with you every step of the way, through this difficult time to brighter times ahead. I know that by working together we can make BC the best place it possibly can be.

I leave you with this quote: "Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Genius has boldness, power and magic in it." We have just begun. Let us continue to build the magic of British Columbia.