

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address at Women in the Lead Conference, Vancouver
October 3, 2002

Check Against Delivery

It's no surprise or shock to anyone that when I was fortunate enough to be elected, one of the first things I wanted to do was make sure we had people appointed to boards in British Columbia that represent the best and brightest minds that we have in British Columbia.

As a man, I represent 47 per cent of the population, and if we didn't get the other 53 per cent of the population involved, we were going to be in trouble because we have some problems we have to solve.

One of the first people I turned to was Elizabeth Watson. Liz has worked very hard in public life in a whole range of activities for a long time.

Liz took the challenge of making sure we appointed the best and the brightest – beyond what anyone could have possibly imagined. There are about 550 boards and commissions in the province. Liz reached out way beyond the boundaries and the barriers we normally associate with those kinds of appointments.

That's no small feat. I was elected with 76 colleagues to the caucus in British Columbia, and everyone knows someone they think is the best possible person in the world to be the chair of BC Hydro, or sit on the board of BC Rail, or be there running PAVCO. It doesn't matter what town you're from: you've got the person who – without doing very much homework – is going to figure out exactly what we have to do to get exactly where we want to go.

Imagine being the Premier, and a caucus member comes says, "I have a friend," and you say, "Submit that name to Liz and I'm sure everything will be OK." She has weathered that challenge exceptionally. That leadership is something we should all take pride in.

It's important that we look at what we can do to break down the barriers that exist between people, and the ideas and the labels that keep people out.

As I look around the room tonight, I see people who are going to shape the future of our province. I would be remiss if I didn't single out my deputy minister for corporate planning and restructuring, Brenda Eaton.

People often have no idea how much work and time and effort and creativity and energy goes into dealing with politicians. Brenda is one of those people who takes the time to explain what's taking place, outline for all of us the challenges that are in front and open the doors to new solutions that many of us have never thought of. She brings an attitude and a sensibility to the challenges we face that is often different than what we are used to.

People want to find a fast, easy, simple solution – and those solutions are not out there any more. Very few things are easy for us to do, and one of the things Brenda has been able to do as we went through our Core Services Review was to keep us focused on the values we have, and on the goals we have set. She has been helped by Sharon Halkett, who is chair of our Crown Agencies Secretariat.

We are facing generational challenges; we are facing cultural challenges – and we have to find a way to break through the rigidity that has held us back from finding solutions. You and I know that if we continue to pursue the same objectives in the same way, we are going to get the same results. Frankly – for my generation at least – I think we failed in a whole series of public policy initiatives and objectives.

It's not good enough to say, "Well, fine – we failed before; let's do a little bit more of that – it will work better in the future." It doesn't. One of the challenges we face as we look at restructuring how the province works – how our agencies work, how our boards work – is to redistribute the responsibility for boards of governance.

I can't tell you how difficult that is.

How many women here tonight are on our health authorities? Would you please stand up? These women have one of the most difficult challenges in the country.

Have a look at your table: how many people are looking younger to you? The fact, is we are all getting older, and our aging is putting increasing pressure on the society we live in and on the solutions that we have become used to or comfortable with.

Huge societal and cultural pressures are imposed on us because of the frameworks we have created over the past generation. This in no way denigrates the decisions that were made in past generations: it simply recognizes that what we face today is different than what we faced in past decades.

I have two sons. Nicholas is 22; he's about to graduate from university. When I graduated from university, we had \$2.84 billion in public debt in British Columbia. When my son Nicholas graduates from university, we're giving him \$40 billion in public debt.

Look at the challenges we face in health care. In British Columbia, we added \$1.1 billion in health-care funding in the last year alone. Health-care funding has grown at seven to eight per cent per annum over the last five years.

Our pharmacare costs are up 14 to 15 per cent a year. The new solution I've heard through the media is more taxes and more programs.

There is nothing in our health-care program today that rewards people for right behaviour. There is nothing that says to individual citizens: "You have responsibilities yourselves as well as our responsibility as a society."

It is very difficult to break through the conventional wisdom and the rigidity of the status quo as we approach that challenge.

We face challenges not just in health care, but in how we deliver the services people want in education.

In this room, I'm surrounded by leaders from our province. Every single one of you, I would predict, believes that public education – the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to discover new things – is critical as we move forward, regardless of how old you are.

Try and break through some of the educational and institutional rigidities that we have put in place: it is very difficult. A critical component of that is to get more women to accept leadership positions – on every board, in every agency, in every form of corporate governance including political governance, business governance, and non-profit governance. Women and young people have got to be included in looking at solutions.

For the first time ever, we've taken the appointment process out of the closet. In February of 2001 there were 931 visits to the Web site that talked about appointments to agencies, boards and commissions in British Columbia. By February of 2002, eight months after Liz had taken on this challenge, there were 99,000 visits to the Web site. In March we reached more than 150,000 hits.

It's not an easy task to get appointed to a board in British Columbia any longer. Every agency is required to provide a needs assessment: what are the talents they need on the board; what are they looking for? Liz works in consultation, co-operation and collaboration with the chairs and talks to them about the talents that are necessary.

Liz has consistently provided us with advice that has allowed us to increase our appointments of women on corporate boards and agencies across the province. We are not there yet, but today 40 per cent of all of our appointments to those significant boards and commissions are women. That's an important step, but we can't stop there.

I want to put this in context: I'm not actually a big fan of 53 vs. 47 or 47 vs. 53. I am really a big fan of getting the best possible people to do the job we need them to do. And I have never been let down by the people who have been appointed by us to the boards and the public agencies in British Columbia.

They consistently show leadership that is beyond the public recognition they get for it. Many of you in this room have done things that often don't get reported, and often you're not thanked for them.

I should spend a moment tonight just to say thank you for the things you do that perhaps the public doesn't notice. But public life notices it. It strengthens our province and it strengthens our opportunities to build a stronger future.

Taking a leadership role is no small task. It takes a long time, a lot of effort, and a change in your priorities.

I can't tell you how often I have tried to recruit women for public office and how often they have said to me, "Someone else can do just as well." I want you to know that's not true. When we ask you to sit on a Crown corporation board, it's because we know what you can contribute.

I want to thank all of you who have taken time out of your personal lives, your professional lives and your family lives to contribute to public life in the province.

Hopefully what you do in public life will help create a new environment in private life. It is appalling that only seven per cent of the people on our boards across this country are women. I am proud that 40 per cent of the people on our major Crown and agency boards are women.

We have to work together to make sure women are in roles of leadership in all walks of life, including public life. Women can set an example for other women to follow and for men to learn from so we can come up with the best possible solutions that provide a future we can all be proud of.

I want to thank you for the leadership you show; I want to thank you for the commitment you've made by being here today and tomorrow; and I want to commit to you that we will continue to work to make sure that we set an example.

Thank you.