



Coalition of B.C. Businesses

**Premier Gordon Campbell
December 8, 2005**

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It's great to be here today, and it's interesting to think about how much difference a year does make in British Columbia.

I was coming down this morning and thinking about where we are as a province. I reviewed some of the statistics which are pretty encouraging to us. I can tell you quite honestly, without the strength of this organization, without each of you being willing to stand up as we went through the first half of 2005 and say what you believed in and say what you thought the direction of the province should be, I would not be standing here today as the Premier of British Columbia.

I think that one of the challenges we face as a government is while we have done very well and, in fact, I think we have gone well beyond what people would have expected we were going to be able to do by 2005 when we were elected in 2001. I really believe we're seeing the positive momentum we've built in the economy. We've seen things happen in energy, in tourism, in retailing, in construction. We've watched across the board the expansion of our economy in every single region of this province.

We have the lowest level of unemployment that we've had ever since we started recording unemployment figures. In some regions of this province Stats Can will tell you we can't even measure anymore. But you know, the fact of the matter is if we stop now we're going to watch those numbers creep up again. We'll go back.

The real challenge, and it's a challenge for government as well as for those that government serves, is never to assume that things are as they should be. If we aren't pushing for change and for improvement and reaching higher for better services or a more competitive taxation regime, more of the sensible regulatory codes, I'll tell you what happens: We all start to slip back. Atrophy sets in, and we move down the wrong path. We want the path to continue going forward and up.

There will be times when we face a very difficult global economy. We still want our momentum to keep us moving forward. If we're standing still it'll fall off.

There are two choices we have, you as individuals, you as organizations and us as a government. We can go back or we can go forward. But what I think is really important for people to recognize is we can't and we won't be able to stay the same. There's all kinds of pressure that's put on us, even today, that's quite a bit different than the pressure we felt in 2004 when we met, and I imagine and I hope it will be different than the challenges that we faced in 2006 when we meet again.

So one of things I'd like everyone to do today is think about next year at this time. What would you like to say that we've done? What do you want us to accomplish as a province? What are the steps we should have taken in government? It might be financial. It could be in health care, education. What do you think that we should have done?

We've talked in the past.... I can remember before we were elected in 2001 having a couple of meetings and we used to talk about reducing the regulatory burden by a third. Do you remember that, when we talked about that? Kevin Evans suggested to me at one point that there were three particular pieces of legislation that kept rearing their head: WCB, employment standards and the Labour Code. Kevin thought the best way for me actually to handle them would just be to get rid of any one of those three; he didn't care which one, just get one out of there altogether.

We haven't quite got to that stage yet. But I'll tell you when you've gone through the numbers in the regulatory regime and you've reduced the numbers, we now have to get to the tough part which is how you decide whether it's the WCB or employment standards or labour and determine what are we really trying to accomplish.

As politicians, we'll say we want to modernize. What you have to be careful when we say modernize that we are clear about what our definition of that is. For me, modernizing means less burden, less cost, faster service, more certainty for you in the business community about what it is we're actually trying to accomplish. What are we asking you to do with this public/private partnership that we're trying to create clarity around that so people can pursue their goals?

Some people when they think 'modernize' they think if we could just layer a few more requirements on we'll be more certain of the outcome. Did you ever notice that? Normally it's people that don't have anything to do with your business because it's a lot easier when you don't have a clue what's going on to say what should happen. Have you ever noticed that? That's sort of one of the hallmarks of government, right?

I can tell you I've never run a retail business. Never run a retail business. So you know in the retail sector here a whole lot more about what gets in your way, what's not working for retailers than government does. How can you fix those things? If we get to the core or the substance of what we were doing how should we manage that and move forward?

We worked months and months at trying to figure out what to do with the housing industry and the local communities. We have this belief that actually local communities are often better at making those decisions than the government in Victoria is. So we tried to provide people with some flexibility by saying: "You decide. You figure out how it works; base it on sound science." What's happened as a result of that is we probably alienated between \$2 and \$3 billion worth of investment which has nothing to do with sound science. So one of the things we have to do is challenge ourselves to figure out why that didn't work. One of the things we have to do is move beyond this sense that whatever we decided in 2002 or 2003 must be right because we decided it. Well, you know, sometimes what we decide will be wrong. What's really important about the Coalition of B.C. Businesses is that you are in the position to come and say to us: "That's wrong. You haven't got it right yet." It's not from ill intent, but from the desire to positively change and improve; to do things differently to get the result that you're after.

I believe if we are willing to do that, to be open as a government and as a business community that comes forward determined to get it right -- get the foundations right -- we're going to continue to move forward. We're going to continue to set an example that others can follow.

It'll be a range of things...if I went to each table you'd have three things that you would want to be different. If we do that, we stay committed to that dialogue, we're going to watch as there's improvement, whether it's in the restaurant business or the development business or the retail business, whether it's with the car dealers. We're going to actually see improvement. But we can't simply sit there and say we're happy, we're satisfied with where we are.

When I turn to the Chamber of Commerce and say to John, "You've got to put forward a plan that allows us to at least get a vision of where you'd like us to go," and they come forward with one, that actually helps inform the government of what we're doing and what we should be trying to do.

This is what you really have to understand in B.C.: There's a lot of politics in this. How many of you really think that it's right that there's politics in business. There's a lot of politics in it. We have a significant opposition that we'll always have.

You know what they're doing now? They're rewriting the Labour Code. Do you think they're rewriting it with your interests in mind? They have gone through now six months and they have not once told us where we could save resources and refocus them. They have not said anything except to spend more.

Now, as we sit here today in our existing climate I think we've done extremely well as a province. I'll tell you there may be a tax problem here. We take lots of money in taxes. How many people really think you're paying too little in terms of taxes, like it's not enough? Any of you feel that way?

There's a group that thinks you're not spending enough in taxes in British Columbia, and they have an awful lot of resonance in the community. You know why? They are working at it every single day. Every day they're out there talking about how much more they can take out of your pocket. Now, they disguise it; they'll say they're going to take it out of the pocket of the rich.

Of course, if you took all the money out of all the rich people in the province, you wouldn't have enough to spend on all the things they want to do.

So whenever you hear "rich", remember it's you. How many in the room were feeling particularly rich this morning? Well, it's you. They're talking about you.

They still think that we, in fact, have not moved forward and tried to take care of more people. Just think of this: With the economy we have today, with the changes that we've made in government, we're investing \$3-billion more dollars every year in health care than we were just four years ago. Three billion more: That's a lot of money.

It's your money, by the way: three billion more dollars.

In education we're investing about a billion more dollars. That's a lot of your money.

Have you ever heard someone say we're spending enough on health care? I had someone phone in the other day, as part of a year-end interview, and ask me why I never spend any more money on health care. What we're doing is we're spending more and more. We're making some real progress, but we have to recognize that you're never going to have enough money to do everything for everybody.

Housing happens to be something that's on my mind right now because we're going to launch some major housing initiatives in the New Year for the province. We have never spent more money on housing in British Columbia than we do today: About \$192-million a year. How many people have you heard say: "Boy, it looks to us like the public sector has finally got the housing thing under control?" You hear about more homes needed, you hear about more housing challenges.

So when you're spending more and more and more, and you look, and the province seems to be getting worse and worse, doesn't it make sense to do something differently? Doesn't it make sense to sort of look at the fundamentals and say to yourselves: "You know what; there must be a different response to solve this problem."

It's not that we don't want to solve it. It's not that previous governments haven't wanted to solve it. It's just that we know that we're not getting to the right solution right now.

So as we get to that right solution, there will be change. As we make changes, we're going to hear from people about why we shouldn't make any. It's one of the interesting things about public life, in fact, in British Columbia and in Canada; we are far more often comfortable dealing with all of the old problems in the old ways than we are with doing something really risky, like thinking of a new solution.

When you think about it, when we were elected in 2001, we actually didn't ask; we said we were going to make some major changes. We went in, and we did it.

As we did that, sure, there were some challenges here and challenges there, but the general thrust of where we were going actually sent a message out that British Columbia was going in a different direction. We were trying to do different things, and that we had to move forward.

Now I can tell you I'm feeling pretty good. As I look back at the last year, I say to myself: "Gord, you're still employed -- fantastic. That's not a small thing." So for the first time after 22 years we re-elected a premier. That in itself is a major step toward stability.

Think of the outside world. The outside world looks to our province.

We tend to think that our province is the centre of the universe; I certainly do. But you know there's another world out there.

I remember, once, someone telling me that Vancouver is the only place in the world with a harbour, and the water, and da, da, da. I went to San Diego, and I noticed there was another place in the world with a harbour and water. You know, it's amazing how many places there are like Vancouver in North America alone.

Unless we take what we've got as an asset and make it something special and different, it's not going to be particularly special and different. It's not just what nature gave us, really. It's what we do with it that's going to make a difference.

We talk about stability. Outsiders look in, and they think: "Well they've had I don't remember how many premiers, dozens of premiers, simply dozens of premiers. Well, that's not stable."

Even Quebec is more stable than that.

So we now have a stable government which is something that we haven't experienced for awhile. And for me it's kind of interesting.

But as I look back at 2005, I can tell you one thing, and this is actually the most important thing. It's not about legislation; it's not about government policy. It's how people feel in British Columbia that is going to create certainty and stability in this province.

I go across British Columbia and I meet people who are pleased to live in this province. They're excited about its future. They've got plans. That means more stability.

We've got businesses opening up. We've got young people coming and saying, "That's where I want to be." We've got people from other parts of the country saying, "Let's go to British Columbia, that's where the action is." We've got people from around the world who say they are going to invest in British Columbia.

You know what? I'm glad British Columbians are proud of being British Columbians. They're out there, leading, talking, saying, "This is our world; let's go grab it." That's a really important change that's taken place over the last year.

In the last year we've opened two new universities. A brand new university, Thompson River University in Kamloops, opening up new opportunities, new distance-learning opportunities for people all over the province, particularly in the North and the Northern Interior of British Columbia.

There's a new University of British Columbia in the Okanagan that's opened up. You should see how proud people are that they've got their own university. The whole Southern Interior is coming to it.

Mike Barber formerly from Slocan Forest Products contributed millions and millions of dollars to bring world scholars to the UBC Okanagan campus. It's the centre of activity, the fastest-growing region of the province.

It's not just the Lower Mainland. Get over 604; get over it.

It's the Okanagan. They've got technology taking place. They've got health care activity taking place, health research taking place. They've got forestry taking place. They've got tourism taking place. They've got agriculture taking place.

Do you know what they're wrestling with? How do we control this growth? How do we make sure that we maintain and improve the quality of life we've got?

Go up to the Peace River. The energy industry in British Columbia is zooming forward. You know, 20 per cent and 30 per cent increases in summer-well drilling. We've watched as the energy explorations have gone up phenomenally.

Mining across the province. Mineral exploration is up four times, 400 per cent over what it was just five years ago.

Now people are going to say the global markets are great. I've got to tell you that the global markets are great. The issue for us is not whether the global markets are great; the issue for us is can we take advantage of that global marketplace? Can we tap into that opportunity?

I talk about British Columbia being a door to the Pacific and the Asia Pacific.... We want that door open as wide as possible. We don't want it to be a single, little door. We want it to be double, triple, quadruple doors that people can walk and bring their business through.

We have a huge opportunity here. In 2005 the Canadian Minister of Transportation comes and says Canada's future depends on the Pacific. Canada's future depends on us making sure we open those doorways, that our ports work efficiently, that we have the rail and the road and airport systems to connect Canada to that part of the world. That's a big shift for Canada and an even bigger shift for B.C.

How many in this room can remember a Prime Minister ever coming or a Minister of the Crown coming and saying British Columbia is central to Canada's future?

You know, what they normally say is: "Well, we can do something for British Columbia because that's sort of a region of the country; we can take care of that region too." This is not about helping this region; it's about this region leading the country.

I go to Saskatchewan. Lorne Calvert's talking about an inland port to take advantage of the Asia Pacific.

We're preparing for a tripling of container traffic over the next ten to fifteen years. A tripling; that's hundreds of millions of dollars, and thousands and thousands of jobs that will come into our economy and the Canadian economy.

Now, there are still people that will try and hold us back from that.

If we actually embrace that vision that means we have to embrace some additional activities. For example, we will not triple container traffic in British Columbia if we don't invest in transportation.

How many of you live in the Lower Mainland here? Will you put up your hand if you live here? How many live to the east of the Port Mann Bridge; would you put up your hand? The huge growth potential for us is to the east of the Port Mann Bridge.

How many of us who live west of it think the Port Mann Bridge is just about as well managed in terms of traffic management as you can get? How many like spending those hours waiting and wondering what the heck is going up there and why are you parked on the freeway?

The fact of the matter is we're going to double the bridge. We've got to double the bridge to move the traffic.

If you move the traffic and move the flow of goods, you actually will find a benefit, not just an economic benefit, an environmental benefit because as you do it, you're going to watch as the region grows differently, this major region of our province.

Surrey's going to grow. It's going to be a major city. Listen to this: there is more growth potential in Surrey than there is in Vancouver.

I'm always glad to have one person here from Surrey, because they, at least, can see the future.

There is a huge amount of growth potential. There's lots of growth potential out in -- are you ready for this? -- Chilliwack, because if we think we're going to take everybody from the Lower Mainland and take them to the farthest extreme, which we think is the western part of Point Grey, that's crazy infrastructure design.

We've got to provide for a transportation system that moves people. We have the largest public/private partnership in the history of the country taking place, right here, in British Columbia with the RAV line: From the airport to downtown Vancouver -- a huge people-mover.

We also have to move goods. We also have to design our communities so that they're placed where people want to live and work and learn and enjoy themselves.

There's going to be a lot of people that try and stop us from doing that. So we have to remember that this is a relentless pursuit of a vision for British Columbia that you are involved in and we hope we're involved in with you.

It's often in the details that we trip up.

So one of the things that's really important for you to look at in 2006, is where do you want to be? What do you want the province to be like?

I don't ask you to spend as much time as I am doing this, but I need you to spend some time; I need you to think in terms of 2006, as you did in 2005. You need to be as active and involved with your MLAs and with the government as you were last year because 2006 isn't a rest year. It's the year that we build on what we've done.

If we're going to set records, we've got to keep pursuing those records; we've got to keep driving for those successes. And we've got to be willing to change our outlook on the world to make sure that we can accomplish the goals that we've set.

We've just launched a major initiative in British Columbia; Canada has as well. It's a New Relationship with First Nations people. That new relationship is going to be critical to us in maximizing the potential of this province.

So from your self-interests, it's important that you help us embrace that new relationship and move ahead. It's also going to be critical to Canadians actually accomplishing some of the goals we've set for Canada.

None of us here think that a First Nations child should have a lower graduation rate, a 30 per cent lower graduation rate than a non-First Nations child; or that a First Nations person should have a 400 per cent greater incidence of diabetes than a non-First Nations person; or there should not be the same economic opportunities. But if you look at where we are today, for whatever reason, with whatever intent was driven, the results we're getting today are not up to standards; they're not what we want in Canada.

So if the results aren't what we want, if we're not getting the outcomes we want, we have to be willing to challenge ourselves, ask ourselves new questions, look for new paths, look for new opportunities. And then we pursue those paths, measure our progress, watch as we move down that path, and see if we've picked the right path. If we haven't, let's alter the path.

In your businesses, regardless of which sector of the economy you're in, I know that every month you're thinking about whether or not you're getting the results that you expect, whether or not you're doing things as well as you can. You're asking yourselves what you can do better to make sure that your business gets ahead creating longer-term security.

What are the new thoughts you have that you apply to your business so that you know that you've got a better future? We have to do the same thing to government.

I know it's difficult, and I know that it's complicated. I know that often it's very difficult to figure out what on earth is driving whatever the political decision is that's being made.

But I can tell you this: Because of the work that you've done over the last number of years, British Columbia is moving at a record pace and we're finally moving in the right direction.

I travel across the country and I can tell you today people talk to me about what B.C. is accomplishing. They actually say: "What have you done there, and how can we do it?" They actually say: "We're watching this because we think you might be at the leading edge, and we might want to copy it."

Talking about public/private partnerships -- you know what? -- we're leading the country in that. In fact, we're recognized globally now for what we're doing in public/private partnerships. We've got hospitals being built; we've got transportation systems being built.

We're not going to actually accomplish the goal of building a public infrastructure we need without thinking of new ways of providing it because there's not enough money in government.

So as we do those things, I'm feeling pretty good about this province. I feel good as your representative and I hope that you all feel good about what you've done because you have created new hope in British Columbia. You have created a new era of opportunity.

You have created an environment where our kids are thinking about their futures right here in British Columbia. We've got people and communities thinking about the plans they've got for their future again. They've got plans for what they want to do next.

That plan isn't a yearlong plan. It's out ten years. So what I ask you today, as you look through 2006, is to ask yourself: What do you want the province to look like? What are the big things that we have to do? Not what are the little things, not how do we control what the headline is day after day, but where do we want to be in 2006 and 2016? And how will that movement and vision affect what happens in 2007 and 2008? And how can government best help you accomplish the things that you want to accomplish in your area of activity?

I was born here. I left for about six years and I came back. And when I was being brought up in British Columbia there wasn't anything that I thought I couldn't do if I really wanted to do it.

We're rekindling that sense of opportunity in this province. We're starting to rekindle the imagination of British Columbians so they can look forward to the most exciting future.

Imagine: We're actually leading Canada, driving Canada forward, having Canada say: "What's British Columbia doing?" Let's not let go of that.

Imagine: People from around the world coming here and saying, "I can't believe how lucky you are to live here." Imagine what it's like in your business to watch as your sales go up this year over last year and up next year over this year and the year after that over that year.

Imagine what it's like when you're having your international colleagues say to you: "What are you doing there? This is great. How are you doing that?"

Do we take what you've learned in British Columbia and transplant it into Saskatchewan or Ontario? Can we do that in Wyoming and Washington State and New York?

We want to be a place that people talk about. We want to be a place that they talk about because we know what we're doing. If you think of what we want to do, what you want to do and you think about the road that we can go down together, I know we can reach that destination.

There's nothing we can't accomplish in British Columbia. With your voices, with your intelligence, your imagination, your drive and your relentless pursuit of your goals, I know that we can reach them.

This is the best place on Earth and you're part of it.

Thank-you very much.



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