

Address to Third Provincial Congress
Premier Gordon Campbell
January 24, 2005

Check Against Delivery

Let me start by congratulating all of our federal MPs for their successful effort in last spring's election. I know it probably seems a long time ago but it's a lot of work I know for all of you to be here and I appreciate the time and effort that you put in to come.

These congresses were aimed at reminding us all that we serve the same constituents and in many cases we have shared goals. As elected representatives of Canada's only Pacific province, we have special responsibilities to the country. And we have a special opportunity I think, to help carry the country forward into the next century.

The first Provincial Congress was on February 26, 2002. Its agenda included the economy, transportation, health and First Nations' treaty negotiations. Coming out of that meeting we agreed to a special congress meeting to be held with the interested MPs, MLAs and local leaders to lay out a plan for improvements for our transportation infrastructure. And we've made a good start.

Over the next three years we have a \$1.3-billion transportation plan for the province. We have begun a new partnership with the federal government as we upgrade the TransCanada Highway. Our first priority was to improve and make safer Canada's entry to British Columbia and British Columbia's entry to Canada through the Kicking Horse Canyon. It's a \$670-million plus project. It is under way and we would appreciate your support as we continue to push for the completion of that project.

We now have to turn our attention to the world's entrance to Canada and Canada's entrance to the Pacific world. Beginning with the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, which is critical both to our environmental and our economic health in British Columbia and in this country. It's critical to the movements of goods for the Canadian economy. And in it's an unacceptable bottleneck on Canada's number one highway.

As well we have to upgrade the Delta port access to the distribution centres that are crucial to Canada's and British Columbia's economic well being. The north and south Fraser bypass routes are in the planning stage and will require all of us to be working together locally, regionally, provincially and nationally to maximize their benefits. Highway 97 and Highway Three remain on the provincial transportation agenda.

We also have to work together for the western part of the country to assure that Canada takes full advantage of the opportunities of the Port of Prince Rupert, a northern gateway to opportunity. I was pleased to see the Prime Minister was in Beijing last week and specifically identified Prince Rupert as a gateway to opportunity for the Asia-Pacific market into the continent of North America. I should point out that it was western Premiers who really did an awful lot to focus everyone's attention on their vision for a

northern port in British Columbia. And we have a great deep-water port in Prince Rupert, that is about to generate a whole new level of economic activity in that part of our province.

When we held a special Transportation Congress, mayors came from the north and the interior and they asked us to start looking at how we could provide for an integrated rail infrastructure in British Columbia, a rail infrastructure that encouraged new investment and new transportation of goods, services and resources from their market places to the international community.

We followed their lead with the establishment of the BC Rail Investment Partnership. It's meant new investments for rail infrastructure. Millions of dollars of investment have already been made in rail upgrades to Prince Rupert, where new container facilities are being created with contributions from CN, the provincial government and the private sector. Ridley Island is shipping coal again. Freight can now take the Chicago Express from Prince George to Chicago and it will get goods to market two days quicker than before.

The BC Rail Investment Partnership also generated \$135-million for a brand new Northern Development Initiative. That Northern Development Initiative puts resources in the hands of Northern communities to invest where they believe it will do the most good for their communities. There's also a new \$15-million First Nations Benefits Trust that First Nations can use to support economic opportunities and their cultural future.

In our 2003 meeting, we all pulled together around the Olympics and we succeeded. The world is now starting to focus its attention on Canada and British Columbia and we think there are enormous opportunities that are created out of that joint effort. I can tell you, without everyone pulling together to secure that Olympic bid, we would not have been successful. As those of us in political life know, when you only win by three votes it's a win but it's not a landslide. Every little bit makes a difference.

The new RAV project is the largest public-private-partnership in the country. There is a \$450-million contribution from the federal government, there's a \$300-million contribution from the airport, there's a \$200-million contribution from the private sector. That's \$950-million that is coming into the public transportation in this region that normally would not be there. It's a great project and you have to take your hat off for the leadership that was shown to us by Doug McCallum as he took us through this. Doug, you did a great job for everyone in Canada and in British Columbia. Thank you very much.

We have made progress since our first congress meeting because we have been trying to work together. We have listened to one another. We have learned from one another. And we have remembered that this is about pursuing the best interests of Canada and British Columbia.

And that cooperation is paying off. B.C. has been the number one job creator in the country since December of 2001: 198,000 new jobs have been created in this province. We have the lowest level of unemployment in British Columbia since 1981. Every region of the province has watched as there are more jobs and as unemployment has started to drop. The number of unemployed people is the lowest it's been since 1990. There are still 136,000 who are unemployed – but we should recognize that is the fewest number of unemployed in B.C. since 1990, in spite of the fact that we've had a million additional people added to our population.

Last year, 27 per cent more new businesses were formed than in 2001. People are moving back to British Columbia. Families are reuniting in British Columbia. In energy, in 2002-2003 there were 152 wells drilled in our province. In 2004-05 they'll be over 250. There was \$3.5-billion invested in the energy industry last year and we're expecting \$4-billion to be invested in the industry this year.

In mining, 47,000 claims were staked in 2004 – the most claims since 1991. Two new coal mines have opened near Tumbler Ridge. In 2001 there was one mine in the Environmental Assessment Program. Today there are 12. In 2001, mineral exploration was \$29-million in the province. Today, Richard Neufeld will announce that, although we expected exploration to jump to \$120-million, in 2004 mining exploration actually exceeded \$130-million. That's four times what it was in 2001.

In forestry, more than half a billion dollars have been invested in B.C.'s forestry plants in mills since 2002. Last year there was a 46% increase in investment in equipment across the province. About 10,000 additional forest workers have gone back to work on the coast since the fall of 2003. We've offered community forest opportunities to 12 communities and we have forestry agreements with 83 First Nations across the province. And we are working on four Agreements-in-Principle with First Nations, as well as reaching 145 economic development agreements for opportunities in everything from shellfish aquaculture to tourism to forestry to oil and gas and the Olympics.

In health care, thanks to the consistent and persistent work of our MPs, as well as Premiers and MLAs across the province, we have a brand new health agreement which provides \$5.4-billion in additional to improve the quality of health care for British Columbians over the next ten years.

When I was at the health conference in September, one of things that I found most encouraging was members from all parties, from all levels of government, were working to find a solution. And I think working together we found a solution that will be in the best interests of Canadians. So thank you to all of our MPs for your work on the health care file.

Canadian initiatives that BC is working on are significant. Let me tell you that I met with the Prime Minister in December of last year and we laid out some critical opportunities for Canada. One of the things that I hope we all can take out of this meeting and move forward with is to recognize that we have a new and important role to play in Canada.

There is only one Pacific province in Canada. I remember right after I was elected mayor of Vancouver, there was a meeting of what they called the “big city mayors’ caucus” at that time. And I was sitting with Ralph Klein, who was the mayor of Calgary then, and I was sitting with Lawrence Decore, who was the mayor of Edmonton, and both of them claimed to be cities that were sitting on the Pacific Rim. I pointed out there was a mountain range between them and the Pacific.

There is only one Canadian province on the Pacific. And that is British Columbia. So as Canada reaches to take advantage of the Asia-Pacific opportunity, we should know that they’re reaching through British Columbia and we have a responsibility to show leadership to Canada and how we can maximize the benefits of that.

We believe that China is an enormous opportunity for us, as well as India. Last week, China granted approved destination status for Canada. That translates into about 100 million Chinese tourists by 2020. We want to make sure that we get at the front of that opportunity today. That’s going to require opening up our skies. It’s going to require providing landing rights to British Columbia’s airports to people from China.

We want the same thing for people from the second largest economy in the Asia Pacific, India. It is important for us to work down both of those paths at once to build a parallel strategy that brings both of those major economies to our shores and our products to both of those major economies. In November of 2003 I visited Amritsar, Chandigarh and Mumbai and we have great and deep roots into those communities. We would like to be able to take advantage of that.

My government will be working on a major trade initiative, with Ottawa, to open up those doors. We will be launching a special initiative from the Premier’s Office to deal with ambassadors and high commissioners, as well as with regional authorities and local mayors to make sure that we have a coordinated and comprehensive approach to taking advantage of the economies that are opening up before our eyes.

It’s my hope that we can emerge from today with a common agenda, in some areas where we have common agreement and common direction, so that we improve the quality of life for British Columbians.

You will see from the agenda that today we intend to touch on the transportation gateway and you will hear from Minister Falcon with regard to that. It is critically important for us to know that the gateway today is effectively at capacity. We need investments in rail infrastructure, in road infrastructure, in port infrastructure. We have a Pacific gateway program and we have a ports competitive strategy that we are putting in place. But we should all understand that British Columbia cannot do it alone. And we are going to need to work in concert with Canada, with local governments and local communities to move forward with that.

We are going to touch on the Pine Beetle situation. The Pine Beetle epidemic that has struck our forests is record in scope. It is enormous and it will challenge all of us to use

our imaginations today to think long-term to make sure that communities of our interior have the economic and social supports they need for a long-term future that takes into account the impact of this epidemic in our forests.

We will also be discussing the Life Sciences Initiative that we are undertaking in British Columbia and our hopes for Canada with regard to that.

These items are by no means an exhaustive list. I appreciate the fact that many of you have suggested other things that we can discuss, and we will certainly try to find ways that we can do that.

There is one other area that I would like to focus on today before I ask the next speakers to comment. It's an issue that's of concern to all British Columbians and all of us as elected representatives. With all the economic and the social development that we see taking place in our province, we all want to be sure first and foremost that British Columbians and Canadians are living in safe and secure communities.

With this body we have a unique opportunity to work together as never before to see how we can make our streets, our schools and our communities safer for everyone. We have every level of government represented here and the means to tackle public safety in a comprehensive and holistic way that has not been done before. In the past years, we've made great strides in working with our police to reorganize and integrate services to meet the challenges of modern crime. But, from law making to law enforcement, from courts to corrections, I believe we can do more. And I believe that working together we can provide leadership on the national agenda with regard to that.

We have to look at the causes of crime and what might be done to prevent them. We have the means to identify the key problem areas for our communities and our province and our country, and to identify key needs and opportunities for improvements and for enforcement. We have the ability to look at the Criminal Code itself and to offer a British Columbian perspective on changes that might make sense. We have the capacity here in this room to look at how our justice system might be improved to better serve all citizens across B.C. and across our country.

We have encouraged the police to form specialized regionalized teams to focus on serious crime, like homicides, which require special knowledge and skills. The Integrated Homicide Team includes 54 officers in 22 communities. The results: prior to its formation, we were able to lay charges in about 50% of our homicide cases. Today, since the establishment of the Integrated Homicide Team, we're able to lay charges in about 80%. That's one of the best records in North America.

We introduced the Bait Car program to lure auto thieves into vehicles designed to lock the doors and shut off the engine remotely once police were in place. Auto thefts in Delta dropped 100% between November 2003 and November of 2004. Abbotsford saw a 64% decrease. And in New Westminster it was 45%. We're looking at expanding the Bait Car program even further.

We've invested in the new PRIME communications system that provides police with real time information about crime and criminals and that analyzes patterns of crime. Today it connects 20 communities and by the end of the year every community in B.C. will be connected to PRIME.

We are going to do more to make our communities even safer. It is not acceptable to us that organized crime is moving into B.C., selling drugs that addict our children and importing illegal weapons that harm innocent bystanders. It's not acceptable to us that marijuana grow operations have been found across the street from schools in our neighbourhoods. They bring crime into our neighbourhoods, destroy our homes and threaten our safety. It is not acceptable that Internet luring and child pornography are becoming prevalent. We need to do more.

We have worked with our policing officials across the province and we will target more resources to fight crime. I can tell you today that the government of B.C. will be investing an additional \$122 million over the next three years for corrections, for policing and for the courts. That funding will provide for 215 additional officers: 89 more to fight major crime; 14 more officers to protect our children from cyber crime and Internet luring; 50 officers for help in 30 rural communities like Hope or Zeballos; 30 general investigation officers for street level drug cases, sexual assaults and other serious crimes; and 32 additional officers who will be assigned to First Nations policing in places like Port Alberni, Burns Lake and Cranbrook.

This is a significant investment in our law enforcement personnel and I'm pleased to make it. It is complemented by the investment in urban policing that we announced in September of last year, with 100% of all traffic crime revenues returned to municipalities for crime prevention and for policing.

A new \$84-million task force on homelessness, addictions services and mental health brings together local government with the federal and the provincial government to deal with that gnawing problem in our society.

New health dollars from the September agreement will provide additional support for mental health treatments and services as well as addictions services.

We have made a start. And we have made progress. But I believe working together, all of us as MPs, MLAs and locally elected representatives, we can do more and we can do better. Today's announcement represents about a quarter billion dollars over the next three years to improve the safety of British Columbians.

Later this year, new legislation aimed at preventing criminals from profiting from their crimes will be tabled for public review and comment. I'll be sure that each of the members here gets copies of that legislation so that you can give us your comments as well. We will also be establishing a new organized crime prosecutorial unit that is dedicated to prosecuting criminal organizations.

But we can still do more. I would like to recommend that we establish a special provincial congress on public safety similar to the congress we had on transportation in 2002. We will appoint a task force that will make recommendations that we can review at that congress in the fall of this year. I think the task force should review potential legislative improvements, including improvements to the Criminal Code, in issues like sentencing and other concerns, as well as investments in crime prevention and policing. I will be in touch with party leaders who I will ask to nominate two members from each caucus, preferably one from a rural riding and one from an urban riding. And I will ask the UBCM to nominate representative mayors and regional district chairs. Then let's reconvene in the fall for a special provincial congress on public safety where we can review and take action on recommendations that make all of our communities safer.

The thing that I've found most encouraging about these congresses is that you all take time to recognize that we are all in the service of the same citizens. You take time to come up with solutions that will work for all British Columbians and Canadians that live in this province.

Again, let me say thank you for the commitment and the contribution you make. I know a number of you are going to have to leave at different times in the day but I do appreciate you coming, just to be here today. And I hope that you will join with us in agreeing that a provincial congress on public safety is worthwhile in the fall. We have shown in the past that when we work together we can create real benefits for British Columbians and for Canadians. I hope that together we will build on those successes.

Thank you very much.