

Address to the Empire Club of Canada and Canadian Club of Toronto

Premier Gordon Campbell

March 9, 2005

Check Against Delivery

It is great to be here, and I want to say thank you to Bart and the Empire Club for inviting me to come. I'm also very pleased to be here with Michael McMillan and the Canadian Club, because I do want to spend a little bit of time here talking about Canada. I think lots of times that we forget how incredibly fortunate we are to live in a country like Canada.

I also want to take a moment just to recognize two of your Premiers who are with us today. After I was only elected in 2001, the first Premiers' conference I went to was in Victoria and that's when I first met your former Premier Mike Harris. When we talk about provinces and about regions of the country, it's easy for us to forget that actually, most of us that are elected in public life do want to strengthen the country. At that meeting in Victoria, it was clear that Mike Harris was advocate for Ontario, but I'll tell you this: he never forget Ontario's role in Canada.

I'm also very pleased to be here with my friend Ernie Eves. Together we worked on trying to secure a new health funding formula for our country. Without Premier Eves' leadership, without the drive that he brought to the first ministers' meeting that we had with former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, we would not have been as successful as we were. We still had work to do, but I can tell you Ernie Eves was a strong voice for Canadians and for improving health care for Canada.

Today, I've come to talk about my province, which has gone through some challenging times. But I think B.C. is on the verge of an exceptional decade of opportunity for British Columbians and also for Canada. The past 3 ½ years in B.C. have shown us that when you set out a plan, when you stay committed to that plan, when you execute that plan and when you build the plan on the basis of some fundamental values that we had as British Columbians and we share as Canadians, we really can exceed our expectations.

Our bid for the 2010 Olympics, for example, demonstrated the excitement of exceeding expectations – of setting a goal that may be a little higher than you think you could reach and then actually surpassing it. Of course, it means that you have to be clear about what your goals are.

We've set five goals for ourselves in British Columbia over the next decade:

1. We want to be the most literate, best-educated jurisdiction on the continent.
2. We want to be the fittest, healthiest jurisdiction ever to host an Olympic Games.
3. We want to be sure that we provide support to those who need our support, in a way that leads the country.
4. We want to be recognized around the world for sustainable economic development that takes advantage of and advances the incredible natural

endowments that we have. We have a responsibility to husband those resources and steward them as we move ahead.

5. And we want to make sure that we have an economy that creates the most jobs per capita over the next ten years.

Those are fairly ambitious goals, but we believe there is no reason why we can't accomplish them.

And I want to go back and just remind you of what we inherited in 2001. We inherited a province that was last place in economic growth in the country. We inherited a province that people were leaving to go to elsewhere in the country. People were actually leaving the province. They were leaving in search of opportunities. They were leaving because they thought there were more opportunities down the west coast in Washington or in California or to the east in Alberta or in Ontario. So one of our goals was to bring people back to British Columbia.

And things have now changed in B.C. Since December of 2001, we've been creating jobs faster than anywhere else in Canada – over 198,000 new jobs in the province. Investment is up. Most analysts say that our economy will be the second- or third-strongest economy in the country over the next year. And people are actually coming back to B.C. – a net gain of 10,000 people from the rest of Canada over the past 2 years.

We're now number 1 in housing starts growth in the country, and we're the only province where housing starts are expected to continue to grow this year. Energy investment in British Columbia has doubled since 2000. Investment in mining exploration has quadrupled since 2000. Our biotech industry is the fastest-growing industry of its kind in Canada.

In our recent budget, we provided for the largest single pay-down of public operating debt in the history of the province - over \$1.7 billion. That's important, and you know, we have a great model right next door to us in Alberta. They've effectively eliminated their debt. We are not there yet, but we're coming.

When we were elected, we said we wanted British Columbians to know this: if you work hard in British Columbia, you can get ahead. You can keep more of your paycheque so you can make more of your own decisions about what you will do with your life. I'm proud to say that today, if you make \$80,000 or less, you are paying the lowest level of provincial personal income tax of any jurisdiction in the country.

British Columbia is back. We are ready to go, and we are reading to contribute to Canada. But as we do that, it is also really important that we understand what we actually face in the world. There are some significant social changes that are taking place, and it requires all of us as Canadians to sort of look those things and develop ways to deal with those in the long term.

One of the issues all the Premiers and I have been struggling with is the challenge of aging. It's something we've known about for a long time and we have to shift the way we think about our society and respond to the challenge of aging in a way that actually allows us to provide for the services that people need as they get older.

That's one of the reasons that it was so important that we get a new health funding formula in Canada. We can't do it by ourselves. It's not a question of saying we want more money for X or Y.

When I was in the airport yesterday, there was a headline on one of the papers screaming: "Premiers want more money." Holy cow! I'd never heard that before. "Premiers want more money." Don't get me wrong, we'll take more money. But what Premiers really want is better service because Canadians want better service. There's no such thing as federal money and provincial money and regional money and local money and school board money and all the other kind of tax moneys that we have. It's your money.

You spend your life earning your paycheque. We take about 50 percent of that away. It's not a question of whether there's enough money being taken out of your paycheques or not. The question is whether we are taking those resources and putting them to the areas that are important to you and I, and whether we're maximizing the benefits or not and whether we're actually measuring whether or not those benefits are accruing to you as a taxpayer or as a citizen.

So the goals that we set for ourselves are important in terms of establishing in our public institutions what we actually have to come together to accomplish. And that means we have to make institutional shifts. We have to be willing to change the way we think.

Let me give you a quick example from today. When Bart introduced me, he said B.C. is looking to the east. The Asia-Pacific is actually west of us. How long have we all called it "the far east"? Why do we call it the far east? Because I can tell you, from British Columbia it's the near west, and from British Columbia that near west is an enormous opportunity.

There was a survey done of Canadians, coast to coast to coast. Thirty-two percent of Canadians believe that Canada is a Pacific Rim country. Seventy percent of British Columbians know that we are in a Pacific Rim country, and the other 30 percent have just come from the rest of Canada. The fact is we are a Pacific Rim country, and Canada better open up its eyes to that fact or we're going to lose a huge opportunity.

When I went to school, we learned about exploration from Europe. We learned about France, and we learned about England. We learned about what was taking place across the Atlantic - hardly anything about the Pacific. We heard about Captain Cook, and Captain Vancouver if you lived in Vancouver, a little bit about the Russians up in Alaska. That's the sort of thing you learned - right? We didn't learn very much about what was immediately across the ocean from us.

Last week I was at conference in Vancouver called Going Global. There was a great big map behind me. Here was British Columbia - way over here on this edge of the map. The whole rest of the world travelled to the east – we need to shift that perspective. It's just like aging, if you think about it. We know this is happening. The question is: can we embrace the fact that it's happening? Can we engage with the fact that it is happening?

The fastest-growing economy in the world is China. The fastest-growing middle class in the world is India. They are to the west of Canada, and there is only one Pacific province in Canada – and that happens to be British Columbia. If we want Canada's economy to embrace the opportunities of the Asia-Pacific, British Columbia is going to have to be a big part of that.

When Ralph Klein and I met one of the things he said was that the port of Prince Rupert is a critical Pacific gateway for western economies and for Alberta. You talk to Albertans. They will talk to you about their wishes for the port of Prince Rupert, and that's what they should do. What are Canada's wishes for our province, for the Pacific opportunity?

It doesn't mean you ignore the Atlantic opportunities and Europe. It certainly doesn't mean we don't continue to maintain and enhance our relationships with the United States. But if we want to balance out some of the challenges we face on softwood or BSE or other things, we'd better have some other markets and some other customers than the United States.

I can tell you this: China is waiting for us.

And one of the great things about our country is that we actually celebrate our diversity. We don't just tolerate it; we don't just put up with it; we celebrate it. The largest lunar new year celebrations outside of China are in British Columbia. We have significant proportions of our population that are directly connected through their families, through their homes, through their traditions, through their culture, back to those Asian Pacific countries. That's a huge asset.

Let me give you a quick example of how that reflects for all of us. Most of us in Canada are pretty excited about the fact that we won the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. I remember coming here and actually asking for support in Ontario and encouraging Ontario corporations to get involved with us. We've seen that across the country - real excitement. I came back from being awarded the Olympic Games in Prague, and we celebrated in Vancouver, and I immediately got on a plane and flew back to Prince Edward Island for a Premiers' conference meeting. The first thing the cabbie said to me when I got in the cab was: "Isn't it great we won the Olympics?" This is Canada's Olympic Games.

When the evaluation committee came to Vancouver, they looked at the site, and they said: "This is great." They said it was spectacular. They said: "Boy, I'd love to live here." They said, "My God, this the best place on Earth" - little things like that.

But you know what really impressed them? We had an event at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre to showcase our multiculturalism in Canada and in British Columbia. The vibrancy of that event and their sense of connection and their sense that any athlete, from any country in the world, could come to Canada and would be doing their best because they would be made to feel at home, convinced them this was a place they wanted to host an Olympics. That is the power of diversity, and that is a power we should be developing in Canada as we move into the decade ahead.

As we look to Asia-Pacific from B.C., I am asking Canada to look to the future in the Asia-Pacific. In B.C., our major export customers, after the United States, are China, Japan, Korea and India. There are real opportunities there for us. To tap those opportunities, we have to open up our ports. We have to invest in partnership. This is not a question of saying: "Could we please have more?" It is a question of investing more, for sure. The province will do that. The private sector will do that. The federal government, I believe, will do that.

We need them to open up not just our ocean ports but also our airports. We need not just to have people be able to land from China in Montreal. They have to land in Vancouver. We're hoping they'll be able to land in Cranbrook, in Kamloops.

We want to continue to improve our rail infrastructure and our road infrastructure and our container infrastructure in Greater Vancouver, because we want Canadian customers to be able to deliver their product to the marketplace. In British Columbia today, 25 per cent of our exports go to the Asia-Pacific. In Ontario it's 2.4 per cent. So we want to make sure that we maximize Canada's economic opportunities we maximize the benefits of each of our regions of our country.

I know that there's lots of chat right now about equalization. There should be an equalization program, but every program doesn't need to be an equalization program. We want all of the regions of our province, of our country, to thrive. British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes: we want all of those parts of the country to thrive, to create opportunities, to create jobs, to have a great education system, to have a health care system that people can count on and to give our kids a sense of hope about what they can do in their part of the country.

Because at the end of the day I think that we're talking about what we can do for the next generation of Canadians. What can we leave them? What can be our legacy to the next generation? I think our legacy can be to unite ourselves around some common goals and objectives. It can be to raise our sights up above the difficulties of day-to-day administration and say, "What can we imagine our country can be?" and how we take the disparate parts of our country and bring them together as a unified and unifying force that drives us forward to create an even better future. How do we create a better quality of life for every Canadian, regardless of their background?

We can do that. We can do it by investing in education. We can do it by becoming the most literate country in the world. And let me just say this: it is unacceptable in our country that over 30 percent of the adults in Canada have difficulty reading. That's unacceptable. We can't accept it as a country. It's unacceptable in a country like Canada that we can't invest in providing for the long-term benefits of our children.

And the power of a strong economy allows us to focus on those things. For example, in B.C. we have launched a new vision, hearing and dental screening program for kids under age six. We know that if we test for that and deal with it early, they will have a better, healthier life. We should do it. We can afford to do it. We have to decide to do it.

In Canada today there are only three provinces with universal pharmacare plans - only three. Ours is very good in British Columbia, but are you happy in having a country where some people don't have that support? Are you happy that there are some parts of the country where kids don't get immunized against things that we know they can be immunized against? A national pharmacare plan actually would allow us to make sure that every young child in Canada can be immunized. We just need the will, the vision and the commitment to do it.

I come from a great province. I love British Columbia. I love the opportunities it presented me as a person. I wanted to present that same opportunity to the citizens that we have in British Columbia. I've lived in British Columbia most of my life. I spent four years in the United States going to school, and then I spent two years in Nigeria, teaching with an organization called CUSO. And it's probably that two years in Nigeria that made me recognize how fortunate I was to be born a Canadian.

We were given an exceptional gift by those who came before us: the gift of citizenship that allows us to decide where we want to go, what we want to do and how we can bring together the positive energy and the values that we share as Canadians. It's with that gift of citizenship that we can craft and shape a future that we can be proud of for the next generation of Canadians.

So today I ask you to imagine what you want your country to be, imagine the example we would like Canada to set, and then join with me and with others in public life as we pursue those goals. We know if we set our standards high, if we allow ourselves to dream a little, if we set our plan in place and we pursue that plan relentlessly, we will achieve it. We will set an example that the rest of the world can follow.

And I want to leave you with the words of someone who was at that Olympic meeting in Vancouver where we celebrated Canada and our diversity. He said to me this. "Canada is what the rest of the world would like to be. It reflects how the world can be." I think today that's true. I think we can even make it more true as we tap into the generosity of spirit of Canadians, as we take the tools that have been given to us, and as we focus on creating a decade ahead of us that's not just full of opportunity but that reaches for a dream that the rest of the country wants to follow. We live in the best country in the world. Let's continue to improve on it. Thank you very much.