

Speech to Vancouver Board of Trade

Premier Gordon Campbell February 22, 2006

Check Against Delivery

I'm here today to talk about the budget, as I'm sure you're aware. It's a budget that really we should take a moment to think about because it takes a lot of work to get to a place where you can make real choices. The transformation that's taken place in our province because of the hard work of individuals in every single region of the province has really been phenomenal. It's required commitment and dedication and discipline.

In two years we'll be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the colony of British Columbia. We'll celebrate the human spirit, the sense of discovery, the encounter of cultures between one another over the last 150 years. I think what we'll really be celebrating, though, is the spirit of British Columbians, their commitment to one another, their commitment to creating a better world, to creating a better quality of life for everybody that lives in this great place. Because of the hard work of people all over this province, we are living in an incredibly exciting time in British Columbia. Optimism is everywhere.

I can remember feeling that way in the sixties, but we lost a little bit of that. It's coming back. You feel it in the northwest, you feel it in the northeast, you feel it in the Kootenays, you feel it in the Cariboo, you feel it in the Okanagan, you feel it on Vancouver Island, you feel it in the Lower mainland. People are feeling good about themselves again. They're feeling good about the province.

Yesterday's budget was the third consecutive balanced budget. British Columbia is number one in job growth in Canada with 275,000 new jobs since 2001. We have the lowest level of unemployment in 30 years.

I'm going to talk about some of the initiatives that we've undertaken through this budget in 2006, but I think we have to remember back to where we were and think of where we've come to. You know what? We should remember: you can fall back or you can go forward, you can lead, you can build, you can create or you can watch as the assets we've got as a province deteriorate. I'll tell you this: with this government we're going to lead, we're going to build, we're going to create and we're going to show the rest of the world what you can do in a province like British Columbia.

To do that, you have to keep your eye on the ball. One of the toughest things that we have to do as we think about the future is sticking to our plan.

Now, you may not remember this but the NDP government, from 1996 to 2001 had five separate financial plans. Every year they'd lay out a plan, every year they wouldn't meet it, and every year they'd have to create a new one, a new title, a new objective, a new whatever.

We have not done that as a government because you have to create a sense of stability and confidence in outside investors and the people that live in the province. We laid out a plan, and what we've done is we've been able to outperform that plan over the last five years.

But I want to be clear about this: it's not government that outperforms a plan; it's the people of the province that outperform a plan. When we set goals and objectives for ourselves, it's people that grab the ideas and say yes, let's reach for the best that we can be, and they outperform it.

The forest industry that's investing hundreds of millions of dollars, the tourism industry that is investing in literally dozens of different resort opportunities in every part of this province, the health care professionals that have been willing to step out front and create a health care system that's been recognized by the Conference Board of Canada as the best health care system in Canada: those people are the leaders, those are the people who have made such a huge difference over the last five years.

I can tell you when I hear the commentary leading up to a budget and coming out of a budget it's quite interesting because, at the end of the day, the challenge that faces a Finance Minister is that everyone's got a favourite. There's a favourite tax we should eliminate. Is there anyone in the room who wouldn't like to eliminate all taxes? Well, we're not going to do that. There's another favourite: let's not have any debt in the province. Of course, that would be great.

But when you decide that, you have to decide which hospitals you're not going to build, you've got to decide which roads you don't need. I haven't heard anyone say they want us to reduce services. They want increased public health services, increased education services, increased post-secondary services, increased training processes, increased transportation infrastructure, increased hospitals, increased schools, increased universities. When was the last time you actually remember reading something that said it's time for the government to cut dramatically back on its services? It doesn't happen.

So part of what we have to face as we look at the budget is we have to recognize that we are a small, open economy. So as you look at the budget and the plan that's been laid out by the province, you'll see there that this year we're anticipating a significant surplus. I want you to hear this about the surplus, though: there's a lot of that surplus that wouldn't be there without what's happened in natural gas prices.

When people say we should plan to spend all the surplus, like they did in the late nineties, you have to consider that a one-dollar shift in natural gas prices either adds or subtracts \$300 million from the government's coffers. Now, in December of 2005 natural gas prices were \$14 and some odd cents; today they're \$7 and some odd cents. Think of what that means if you annualize it. Think of the challenge that presents to a Finance Minister as she looks out and says: what can we depend on? Because this is a government that does believe in balanced budgets. This is a government that does believe in financial accountability. This is a government that does believe in fiscal stability. We are going to stay with that, and we're not going to pretend that when you're at a peak, it's a new plateau. It's a peak; it's the highest it's been. There's not much chance it's going to stay up at 15 bucks. We know that. It's already down to seven. We hope it'll stay between six and seven. Just think of this: if it falls to five, \$600 million comes out of what we have projected, right now, for next year as a surplus.

We have a \$600-million surplus next year plus an \$850-million forecast allowance. It's because of that volatility, that we have to plan that in. And we're going to stick with the plan. No matter how much we'd like to move away from the plan, we have to stick to the plan. That's why our credit ratings have been improved in British Columbia; that's why we have stability; that's why we have investment. That's what we're going to continue to do.

Everyone has a favourite, as I've said. In government we're concerned about our debt, and we're going to have to work to reduce debt. But I want you just to take a look at what's taken place with debt over the last number of years. There's been a dramatic decline, from 27 per cent to 20.8 per cent in the provincial debt-to-GDP ratio. We're going to continue working to lower our debt.

But sometimes we do have to invest as our population grows. And we have become a place where people want to be again. I know we all remember the nineties when people were leaving; our kids were leaving; the tradespeople were leaving. You know what? They're coming back.

Unfortunately, it's hard to bring those trades people back, which is one of the reasons we've expanded the training budget.

But we've seen a net gain of over 16,000 people from other provinces. And our population has grown over 170,000 since we were elected as government. Our province is starting to grow again.

That growth creates demand. That demand may be in different places than it's been in the past; so we have to plan out for the long term and say how can we meet the needs of those people?

We have said quite specifically that one of the things that's critical for us is to keep our eye on taxpayer-supported debt. So again, we've committed to the continued downward trend of taxpayer-supported debt. The ratio of taxpayer supported debt to GDP has gone from 21.3 per cent in 2003-04 down to 15.4 per cent in 2008-09. That's a very important measure. It's a measure that's used by rating agencies. Taxpayer-supported debt is a critical measure for us, and we intend to continue it moving down.

But for those who say we should eliminate the debt, we should be aware of the fact that this government, at least, is going to have to invest. We're going to have to invest in capital plans. We had a huge capital deficit that was built up through the 1990s in roads, in hospitals, in post-secondary education.

We're going to have to look at new ways of structuring our capital investments, to minimize the impacts, the risks, and the costs to taxpayers. That's why British Columbia has established Partnerships BC. We actually have become a national leader in providing services and value to taxpayers, and everybody else seems to understand that except for the folks that live in British Columbia. I can tell you this: we're going to keep using Partnerships BC because that's where we're going to get great value for people in the long term in this province, and that's our goal.

It's critical for us to recognize that the public services that we provide are critical to all of us. The public servants in British Columbia have done a great job over the last four and a half years. The job that's been done is not done by politicians alone. We can lead; we can set goals; we can set objectives. It's the public service that has stood up and actually been creative and thought of how they can make sure that our province is leading the country. And they're doing that in jurisdiction after jurisdiction. Whether it's the solicitor general ministry and what we're doing in integrating police forces; whether it's the health ministry and what we're doing to try and make sure we have a comprehensive health plan, that goes from where we are to where we may be; whether it's education or post-secondary education, with the largest expansion we've ever had, our public servants have actually led the way.

So you'll know from this budget that the largest single commitment we made is to the public sector. The public service is important to us.

But I want everyone to understand this, because there are some difficult negotiations now. It's not as easy as it was before because we're going to look at what market comparators are, we're going to look at different responses in different parts of the public service.

But just think of what we've done here. We've set aside up to \$6 billion for the negotiating framework. I guess I'm never surprised anymore when people say that what we're trying to contribute to the public service is never quite enough, according to some of their leaders. One out of every two dollars of fiscal room that we think we can have over the next four years, we have earmarked for public sector wage negotiations.

We're trying to get those negotiations done. We've provided for a billion dollars from this year. Now where does that billion dollars come from? I mentioned natural gas to you earlier. We have a windfall here which we're willing to share.

If we don't, in fact, come to resolution, those dollars go directly to paying down debt. British Columbians will benefit from that in the long term; there's no question about it.

But we do think it's fair to look at the public sector and all the work they've done and say, look, we want to share some of this benefit with you.

But we do believe in generally accepted accounting principles. We're recognized for that as well. We do believe that we have to follow through with what the auditor general has told us. So if we don't have that upfront negotiated settlement in place, those dollars go directly to debt.

Then, there's \$4.7 billion that's available over the term of the agreements, which we'd share out. On top of that, we're saying we're looking for a four-year

agreement. We know that's a longer term than normal; so there's a \$300-million amount that we've set aside for that.

I just want to put this in context, because it goes back to what I was saying before. We make choices. Now, frankly, I'm pleased to be in a position where we can make a choice today. When we were elected, there were no choices. We had to get our costs under control; we had to get the way the government was running under control; we had to eliminate deficits, and that eliminates a lot of choices. But we've got choices today. We've chosen to put resources toward the public sector.

But when you hear over the next few weeks that we haven't done enough, I would like you to think of this. In the last year of the framework, the total annual compensation for increases in the \$4.7-billion amount is \$1.965 billion. That's a cost every single year, going out. Put that in context: that's the equivalent of a 4 per cent reduction in PST. The \$6 billion that we've allocated for this framework over the next four years is the equivalent of building two Gateway projects: the South Fraser bypass, the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, the expansion of the Pitt River Bridge – two of all those. Six billion dollars is a lot of money.

We've tried to be fair and reasonable to our public sector workers, and we're going through these negotiations. I'm very hopeful that we will manage to find resolution by March 31.

One last contextual piece for your information because I want you to remember this as you go through the next few weeks and hear about what's happening. The total tax reductions that we provided between 2001 and 2005 are \$1.6 billion. Because the economy is starting to work, we're ready to balance that off and be fair and reasonable with the public sector.

Some people have told me: you're not being reasonable; you're being too fair. I think it is fair because it provides a stable, sound foundation for us to move to the future. It's that balance that allows us to move ahead with other initiatives that we've outlined in this budget: like the \$733 million in total tax relief over the next four years, including \$424 million in new tax reductions.

People have said: Well, you should have done more here or more there. We actually established a competition council last year to say: come back, and give us your advice on how we can be more competitive. And when you leave the room today, I'd like you to remember two specific words: competitive and productive.

We've said to the competition council: give us your advice. We're going to work with them over the next year. But the great work that's been done over the last four years can be eroded quite quickly if we do not maintain our competitive position and if we don't increase our productivity in the province.

We're going to come to you and ask for help; we're going to come to industry sectors and ask for help; we're going to look across British Columbia for help — because I can tell you this: we are going to raise our productivity, and we are going to be competitive, because when we've got a level playing field, we win, in British Columbia. And that's our goal as a government.

In the February 2005 budget we ensured that British Columbians in the lowest two tax brackets paid the lowest personal income tax rates anywhere in the country. In the September budget announcement the new Finance Minister ensured that seniors were getting the support they need with the seniors' supplement. She also reduced the general corporate income tax, from 13.5 to 12 per cent.

You might recall that our opposition said: Well, nobody even wanted that; what are you doing that for? We're doing it to try and maintain our competitive position in British Columbia.

In this budget, we felt it was important to focus on families in British Columbia, in the people of British Columbia, and the building block of creating safe, secure communities across the province, and that's our families. So we provided significant tax relief to families over the last number of budgets.

So today a seniors' couple with an income of \$30,000 will pay over \$1,000 less in total provincial tax than in 2001. That's significant to them.

If you look at some of the initiatives that we've undertaken, you'll see that a family of four earning \$30,000 per year will pay \$1,350 less than they did in 2001. In fact, if you earn \$15,500 or less in British Columbia, you pay no provincial income tax in our province. So that was a start.

We want to be sure that people on lower income levels were actually having the kind of tax relief that I think most British Columbians would like them to enjoy.

But we also know there's a lot of families in our province that are working harder, and they come home, and they say: I just don't feel like I'm getting as far ahead as I'd like. We know that what's happened with the thriving economy is our housing prices have gone up and our real estate costs have gone up significantly. So we decided that one of the things that we would do is something that hasn't been done for over a decade. We decided that we were going to increase the homeowner grant. So today in British Columbia, homeowners, this year, will receive \$100 larger homeowner grant than they did last year: that's a 22 per cent increase in the homeowner grant.

That does a number of things. First, we've increased the value that the homeowner grant is available for. That means 27,000 families in the province will still continue to receive a homeowner grant. We've increased the grant for seniors, for veterans, for disabled people: up to \$845 — that's money in people's pockets.

So for an average family in B.C., that means \$100 more in their pocket. They'd have to be planning an additional \$10,000 of purchases to benefit from a 1 per cent cut in PST and get the same benefit in terms of their pockets.

And we have to encourage home ownership. The real estate market has been booming; we've had huge increases in housing growth and building and that's a good thing for our economy. Every home that's being built generates about 2.3 jobs into the economy and we want to keep that going if we can.

As we provide for those tax reductions, we also have to recognize that people look not just for tax relief but they look for services, because at the end of the day our job is to try and provide you with the services that you want, in the most cost-effective way possible — and if you think the service isn't important, maybe not to provide it anymore.

Health care is enormously important. By 2008, our estimated health care expenditure will be \$13.26 billion a year. In 2001 when we were elected, it was \$9.3 billion. If you just look at the next three years, the increased health funding accounts for \$1.9 billion of increased funding. That's not sustainable in the long term.

If we want other services – if we'd like education, if we'd like roads, if we'd like policing – you can't keep driving those budgets out because we're driving the health care budget up. That's one of the biggest challenges that we all face as a society. It's a political challenge, certainly. But beyond being a political challenge, it's a challenge for ourselves, for our families, for our communities, for our province, for our country. Just so we don't feel lonely, it's a challenge that's being felt in every western country in the world. There are huge pressures that are being applied across the world as the baby-boom generation ages.

Now, I know there are many of you who were standing here or sitting here when I made my first speech to the Board of Trade as the mayor of Vancouver in 1986, and you're thinking to yourself: he hasn't changed a bit. My doctor knows differently. We all change. We all age. We want to age healthier; we want to be better.

But we have to have a sustainable health care system. Is there anyone in this room that doesn't think it's important for us to provide a sustainable health care system for our kids? How can we be confident that they will have the same quality and level of care that we have?

We'd better be willing to ask ourselves some questions. We intend to do that. As I've said earlier, I'm going to be going to Torino later for the closing of the Games, but I'm also going to follow that up with a trip to Sweden, to Norway, to France, to England — all of whom have better health determinants than we do in British Columbia, according to the OECD and the World Health Organization. We're going to learn.

We can go out and learn stuff. We can bring it back to B.C. and put it to work for British Columbians. I need your help as we do that. I need you to ask questions; I need you to be part of this discussion, because it is part of our budget. Every year it's part of our budget: what are we doing with health care. It's a big part of our budget: 301 million additional dollars, \$1.9 billion over the next four years.

We've got to do things to reflect the importance of that because we're investing huge dollars: \$140 million to the Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Clinic; \$49 million for the expansion of a critical care centre in Surrey Memorial; \$100 million for residential care beds; \$120 million for the new academic ambulatory care centre in Vancouver at 12th and Oak; \$75 million for the new surgical innovation centre at the University of British Columbia Hospital; \$60 million for drugs and services for people with cancer and cardiac and renal and transplant patients, for pharmaceuticals. We're providing \$15 million for ActNow! BC.

We all have friends that are now a little bit older; they're getting in the hospital. There's a lot of them that wouldn't have to be in the hospital if they'd done a little bit today. I know that's tough for us to deal with. We've got to try and deal with it. British Columbia is leading with that, with Act Now! British Columbia.

I've spent a lot of time on health care because health care is really important to us. And health care is really important to our children, which is why one of the things that we've done is we've said we're going to be diagnosing children for hearing and sight and dental challenges when they're young, and we're going to be treating them because we know if we treat them earlier, they have a fuller, healthier, happier life.

One of the goals of this budget is to make sure we have resources available for young kids in British Columbia. It's fashionable to say that kids are our future. But kids are our present; they are here today. There are things we know we can do to make sure that those children that are born in British Columbia have the brightest-possible future regardless of their circumstance.

So we're investing \$421 million over the next four years to expand services and programs for B.C.'s children. There's \$100 million for additional services to make sure that we can provide for ongoing improvements to service for children in difficult circumstances.

There's \$30 million for a family independence fund. You know, for some of us, we don't think of what it must be like to have a child with specific and particular difficulties. People face challenges every single day that are far and above anything that we can imagine, as we have our healthy kids at home with us. Thirty million dollars is there to help those families. It can be for things like lifts in their homes, special equipment for their automobiles, because we want to do everything we can to keep our families together. There's nothing better for a child than a loving, supportive family. In British Columbia we can help do that, and we intend to do that with that investment.

The largest single public service we provide to children in British Columbia, though, is their education system. Our funding for K-to-12 education has gone up at record levels, and it now remains at record levels. You'll see there that our funding is anticipated to be \$5.25 billion by 2008: that's the highest it's ever been in British Columbia.

But here's what's very interesting: funding continues to rise, while school populations are dropping pretty dramatically. Today in British Columbia there's an average of 17.7 students in kindergarten classes, 20.8 students in grades 1-to-3, 26 students in 4-to-7, and 25 in 8-to-12.

We are trying to provide more specific services and more support for kids with special needs. We're trying to be sure that children in the province generally, get an array of opportunities so they can learn and be the best that they can possibly be as they look to their own future.

Here's what's important as we go through the discussion about public education: it's public. It includes parents; it includes principals; it includes teachers; it includes school trustees. A public education is, by definition, inclusive. We have to think to ourselves what is it we're trying to accomplish with that system?

One of the things that's been most interesting to me as we've gone through debates over the last few months is there's a word that's been left out: achievement. One of the things that our investment in education has done is it's led to higher levels of achievement in British Columbia. We have the highest level of graduation that we've ever had in the province. We've watched as aboriginal graduation rates have gone up. We've watched as our students are doing extremely well in international tests. Achievement is the goal that we set for ourselves; so our kids can judge for themselves and their parents can judge how well they're doing. We want to continue to do that.

As we provide for additional resources for K-to-12, we're going to provide additional resources for post-secondary education as well.

The best preventative health care program we've developed so far, that I'm aware of, is education – because when you're educated, when you do have a sense of confidence about what you can do and how you can manage things, you actually are healthier; you have more control of your life. We know that when people have more control over their lives, they're healthier.

We know that when people are at work, they're healthier. That's why it's so good for British Columbia that there's 44,000 people who previously were on income assistance, that are now at work. They're making more money. They have more control over their lives. They have a better quality of life. That's what we want to do.

In post-secondary education we are carrying out the most massive expansion that we've had in this province in the last 40 years. There's a new Thompson Rivers University that has been created. Simon Fraser University in Surrey has been created. The new Okanagan UBC Okanagan University has been created. Twenty-five thousand additional spaces in advanced education: that's critical.

We're looking at \$161 million on top of the \$300 million that was already allocated for advanced education.

As we build on advanced education, we have to work with our colleagues across the country and with the national government because we need a national training strategy in Canada that takes people and raises them up so they can take full advantage of the economic opportunities that are in front of them.

Over the next 12 years it's estimated that in British Columbia alone we're going to generate one million additional new job openings. There are 650,000 kids that are going to graduate from high school. That means there's one job for every one of those children, plus 350,000 additional that we have to train for. If we're thinking of productivity, the more productive we get, maybe we won't need to have to fill that 350,000 gap, but I can tell you that we've got to get to work on it. We have to use all of our resources in the country to do that.

It's critically important to us that we build apprenticeship training. So we provided \$400 million in this budget to expand skills and training.

In 2000, when I would talk to people like the Board of Trade, they'd say you've got to get your tax regime under control: the most important thing you can do is get rid of all these impediments that you put to investment. That's the answer for a failing economy. You know what I hear today? Training, training, and training: that's the answer for a successful economy. We intend to continue to push that successful economy and to continue to train British Columbians so they can take advantage of it in every sector.

The Industrial Training Authority, the ITA, is in place, and it's been a huge success. There's been a 73 percent increase in the number of apprentices since 2004 – 73 percent. When we were elected in 2001, there were about 14,000 apprentices. Today there are 25,400. This plans us out to take us up to 35,000.

There is \$90 million available for tax incentives for training across the province, and we're going to come to you and say: how can we make those dollars go the longest way to increase the opportunities for training?

I was saying earlier today that there isn't a sector of the economy that doesn't tell me that they've got a people shortage. Remember back in 90s? We had people looking for work. Today we've got work looking for people. We've got the energy industry says: "We need more people." There's the forest industry that says: "We need more people." We have the technology industry that says: "We need more people." There's the tourism industry. Guess what they say: "We need more people." And they have to be trained, and we have to raise the level of all of us in British Columbia so we can meet our full potential as a province, and we intend to try and do that.

You know, the buzz word that's used often in these discussions talks about "diversifying" our economy. Well we're going to diversify to our strengths. Right now our forest industry, our energy industry, agriculture, the fishery, mining: those are the cornerstones of B.C.'s economy. Our resource industries remain our cornerstones. They're going to be there for a long time.

That doesn't mean that they aren't going to have to change, they aren't going to have to be more productive, they aren't going to have to be more competitive. We are a small, open economy. Those commodities are price takers, not price makers, so we have to make sure, as we move ahead, that we do everything we can to strengthen the opportunities that are created there.

So we're going to provide \$400 million to diversity to our strengths, as I said. Fifty million is going to go to establish a natural resources and applied science endowment. We want to make sure that there are more engineers available and more research that can be directly applicable to our natural resources. Whether it's the mining industry, the forest industry, the energy industry, we want to be leading the way.

There's \$115 million dollars being provided for science research to attain and attract talent and keep it here. We've continued to invest in that, and we're going to do that into the future.

I mentioned health care as a cost. Well, one of the things that can stop the escalation of health care costs is for us to find new ways of prevention. One of the things we intend to do with the Canadian Cancer Society is establish a 44-million cancer prevention chair. That chair will do research that will tell us how we might be able to prevent cancers. We all would prefer to prevent them than to have to go through curing them.

There's \$15 million that's been set aside for the Pacific Alzheimer's Research Foundation. I mentioned earlier we were aging. One of the issues of aging is dementias. If we can make a dent in dementias and how they affect our lives, we can save hundred of millions of dollars over the long term.

By applying research and development and looking at our strengths, the province is saying we can lead the world, as we did with SARS and as we've done with so many other things. We can in fact strengthen our economy, reduce our costs in terms of long-term, sustainable provision of services and make our province even more competitive and more productive in the long term, because at the end of the day that's what we have to do.

I guess you'd be surprised that a Premier would come and show you that we've still got some ways to go in terms of some of our taxation regime. I accept that. I recognize that. We do have to look to the future together. We do have to look at how we're going to make ourselves more competitive and more productive.

And I want to give you an example of this. I've talked a great deal about the gateway program and the gateway strategy. I've talked to you about debt. Well, let me just give you an idea. Container traffic at our ports went up by about 6 percent. That sounds pretty good, except that Seattle's went up 18. We're at risk of falling behind.

We are Canada's only Pacific province. We are closer to the Asian markets. We have a transportation infrastructure that can supply them, but we're going to have to invest in it, and that's where we're going to keep our competitive edge. We have to invest to make sure that competitive edge carries us to the future.

We can do just about anything we want. We can't do everything we want all at once, but we can do just about anything that we want to do if we just have the will to do it. So, as we look the future, we have to build on our traditional industries, and we have to recognize the power of the new creative economy that we're developing in British Columbia as well.

We've committed substantial dollars to our film industry, but one of the things that we've done in this budget is we are going to create a new world centre for digital media education right at Great Northern Way with Simon Fraser University and BCIT and Emily Carr and UBC, and we're going to create a critical mass that's going to create more and more jobs, more and more opportunity, and we're going to be recognized as global leaders.

I love being a global leader in British Columbia. Don't you guys like being a global leader? We have the resources, and — this is what's really important — we have the talent here already to do it. When I talk about building and diversifying to our strengths, we have it right here, today, and this budget is aimed at trying to make sure we liberate that strength and liberate that talent to take full advantage of it.

As we do that, we should be thinking about how we can build our creative infrastructure in the province. We are going to create a new national centre of aboriginal art in British Columbia. We're going to create a new Asia Pacific museum and create trade and culture. Our strength is our diversity. It's the people that live here. It's the culture we generate.

I'll tell you a quick story. Right now at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, there is an exhibit on northwest aboriginal art. There are two first nations from Washington State that are part of that show. There is one first nation from Alaska that's part of that show. And there are ten from British Columbia that are part of that show. Our first nations in this part of the world are recognized everywhere. Surely, we should recognize them too and celebrate that too.

So as we look to the future, I want you to look with a sense of confidence. I hope you'll look with a sense of optimism, because I'll tell you, you're not going to find a better place in the world to live; you're not going to find a better place in the world with more opportunities.

You know, we have some challenges. We have a pine beetle that's ravaging our forests. We're going to put hundreds of millions of dollars, and the federal government's going to join us in a partnership toward fighting the pine beetle and making sure that we have a long-term future for the communities that are so dependent on forestry in B.C.

We're doing \$129 million worth of investment to build new roads and access and increase the winter drilling season for the oil and gas industry.

We're going to invest \$30 million in economic development and conservation on the north coast and the central coast.

We've got millions of dollars we're going to invest in tourism infrastructure so we build towards that 150th anniversary of British Columbia. It's going to be a celebration of British Columbia and all we've accomplished.

In 2010, we're going to celebrate British Columbia and all that it's accomplished. There's \$21 million there to actually promote the 2010 commerce centre. There is billions of dollars of opportunity that has been opened up. There is a doorway. Walk through the door. Take advantage of it.

Right now in Torino, BC-Canada Place is the most popular attraction at the Olympics — thousands of people visit it every day. The other night at 1 o'clock in the morning a couple of our staff people were going by it. There were 200 people looking in the house. Know what they were looking in? They were looking in a log home.

Some people said: "What would you do that for?" We did it because other parts of the world don't know about what you can do with wood. They're looking at a log home. They're seeing the technology. They're seeing the resorts. They're seeing the opportunities. They're seeing the vintners. They're seeing the communities. They're seeing Whistler. They're seeing Vancouver. They're seeing you. They're seeing our province.

And you know, today I can tell you I'm going off to Torino, and I think Vancouver has already had a big impact on the Olympic movement, because on Sunday, for the first time in history, a quadriplegic person is going to go and receive the Olympic flag and take it on behalf of our city and our province and our country. And think what that says about you.

We've done a lot in four and a half years. We've got a lot that we have left to do, but you couldn't have a better place to do it in. I have had the chance to meet with people in this province over the last four and a half years. I've seen the excitement in their eyes when they talk about their ideas about what they can do, about what they can contribute to our province, what they can contribute to our country.

There is one ad that's going on right now for the Olympics that I love. It's the one that shows the athletes and says the flame goes out at the stadium, but it doesn't go out with the athletes. Have you seen that one? They just keep working, training, focused on their objective.

Let's take that flame. That Olympic flame's not going out. We are going to be the best that we can be. We are going to commit to a vision of British Columbia that creates the best possible health care system and education system in a place where people can pursue their goals and their objectives, where our public institutions like our government are working in partnership with the citizens that support it.

We can do that in this province. We do live in the best place on Earth. Let's keep working to make it even better.

Thank you very much.

