

SAYING GOODBYE TO THE GAMES

March 22, 2010

Premier Gordon Campbell's Statement to the legislature on the recently-completed 2010 Paralympic Winter Games



Premier Gordon Campbell and Prime Minister Stephen Harper attend the closing ceremony of the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games.



Premier Gordon Campbell

Check Against Delivery

Last night, we marked the end of remarkable time in the history of our province and our country as the Paralympic torch was extinguished, and we all said goodbye to the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games.

It was the end of a remarkable story written by countless Canadians and thousands of others around the world who we are proud to call our friends.

The 2010 Winter Paralympics were the most watched in history. Thirty-three nations televised the first Paralympic Winter Games ever to be held in Canada. As Sir Phillip Craven, the president of the International Paralympic Committee, said, "The 2010 games were truly magical" and in his words, "the best games ever."

The International Olympic and Paralympic committees gave us a great opportunity. I know all British Columbians and certainly all Canadians are grateful and honoured that we were allowed to host those games in our province and in our country. It was an exceptional opportunity for all of us to open our doors to the world and welcome new friends from nearly every corner of the planet.

The Paralympians gave Canadians a chance to have a defining moment in our history – yet again – and they provided a stage for a display of incredible Canadian pride. At the same time, they gave Paralympians the opportunity to show their incredible athleticism, their dedication, their commitment, and left an unequivocal message that the most powerful muscle in the human being is their heart, their imagination, and all we can do when we dream and pursue our goals together.

To all the Paralympic athletes, I would like to say a special thank-you for reminding us of the values we have and the values they have shared with us that help make us a better society: sportsmanship, dedication, friendship, and an unparalleled respect and honour of each other.

We should all pause today and remember the Georgian luger, Nodar Kumaritashvili who unfortunately lost his life at the beginning of this incredible odyssey. I take my hat off to John Furlong and the people from VANOC who have reached out continuously to the people of Georgia to offer our thanks for their understanding, our support and our sympathy.

Mr. Furlong, today, is in Georgia with them as they remember that great athlete. We will all remember him in Whistler, in British Columbia and in Canada as we have a memorial constructed in his honour.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Paralympians who taught us what it really means to overcome a challenge and who remind us that every day the human spirit can drive us forward to a better life for all involved in our communities.

We've had the opportunity, I think, in the last month and a half to watch some truly great athletes who deserve our respect, they deserve our honour, and they deserve our thanks for the example they have set for all of us.

The Paralympians bring out the best in all of us and raise awareness of the necessary steps we have to take to help others in our community and others around the world. Programs such as Canada's

Soldier On program – which provides the resources and opportunities for ill and injured, past and present, Canadian Forces personnel to fully participate in physical fitness, health promotion and sport activities – are just as important as the Own the Podium program is to our Olympic athletes. They are just as important, as they inspire people to become fully part of our community and pursue their own goals and objectives.

Not only did the Paralympians inspire us, did they ever know how to put on a great show? For anybody that had the opportunity to see the Paralympians on the slopes, in the rinks, on the curling sheets, you will know that they are truly great athletes with superb talent and a passion that's unmatched in any other sport in the world.

And we should all take a moment to be proud of our Canadian Paralympic athletes. North Vancouver's Lauren Woolstencroft became Canada's first golden girl when she set a Canadian record for the most gold medals in a single Paralympics, with five gold medals. She truly did dominate the standing women's alpine competition, winning super combined, slalom, Super-G, downhill and giant slalom events.

Edmonton's Viviane Forest won five medals in visually impaired category of women's alpine, including one gold in women's downhill, three silvers and a bronze medal. Viviane was aided by her guide Lindsay Debou from Whistler, British Columbia.

And, of course, there was the inspiring story of Brian McKeever, an Olympian and a Paralympian from Canmore, Alberta, who won three gold medals at the Paralympics with the help of his brother and sight guide Robin.

Canada continued to show that we are the best at one of our national pastimes when it comes to mixed wheelchair curling team, when they took home the gold medal with a narrow – much too narrow, I said to Jim – 8-7 victory over Korea. Four of the five members of that team were from British Columbia: Jim Armstrong and Darrell Neighbour from Richmond, Ina Forrest from Armstrong, Sonja Gaudet from Vernon, as well as Bruno Yizek from Calgary. What a great job they did for all of us.

During these Paralympics Colette Bourgonje of Saskatoon was actually competing in her ninth Paralympics. She managed to win a silver and a bronze medal in women's sitting cross-country events. I was fortunate enough to be on the mountain the day that Josh Dueck won a silver medal in men's slalom sitting event, right here in British Columbia. He's from Vernon. Carolina Wisniewska from Vancouver won a pair of bronze medals from women's alpine skiing standing events. Canada won 10 gold medals, 19 medals in all and came third for a record number of medals for Canadians at Paralympic Games right here at home.

I know we want to say congratulations to all the countries who participated in the games, to all the athletes who participated in the games, but a special thank you to all their families, all of their friends, their supporters, their coaches and their technicians. All of them overcame some pretty incredible obstacles to be able to compete at the international level on behalf of their country. They made all of us proud with not just their participation but the excellence they showed in each of the sports that they chose.

The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games were the culmination of years of hard work by thousands of people. Thousands of people gave their time year in and year out, month in and month out. Just in the last number of weeks we have seen that incredible army of blue-jacketed volunteers from every corner of our province and every province in our country make sure that everyone knew that when they came to Canada, they were welcome, we wanted them to do their best in the field of play, and we were proud of all that Canada had to offer them. To them, we should say a very special thank you for volunteering their time and for making these Olympics truly exceptional.

As John Furlong said last night, I'm sure that Jack Poole was watching down, and had a big smile on his face. He started with a vision to make sure that these were Canada's Olympics, that we embraced all Canadians, that we embraced Paralympians from every part of this country and that Canada was able to hold themselves up to the world, to be a mirror to the world of what we have and what we offer to people when they live here.

The Paralympics should surely remind us of what we have accomplished, but as Rick Hansen so eloquently reminded us yesterday, they should also remind us of what more we can do – what more we can do to reach out and help people reach their full potential in whatever line of endeavour they may choose to pursue.

To athletes, to the media, to torchbearers and community organizers across our province, to the people who have spent their lives bringing these games to us, I'm pleased to stand here on behalf of all British Columbians to say: Thank you for the example you have set and for the gift you have given us in the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Together, complete strangers waved the maple leaf flag with glowing pride and patriotism. Together, we chanted: "Go, Canada, go!" Together, we erased the boundaries that often separate us from pursuing our common objectives and our common goals. Together, whether we were in restaurants, celebrating on our streets or in the comfort of our own living rooms, we broke out and loudly sang O Canada.

I won't forget one story that I was told. Someone had come to go to the closing ceremonies. The streets were packed. They decided to park their car in a parking lot a few blocks away from the stadium. On the way there the five-year-old daughter sang O Canada every step of the way. She was joined by a different choir and a different chorus of people singing O Canada with her. As he said to me: "I am sure that my children won't remember any particular sporting event, but they will remember singing O Canada when we hosted the Olympic and Paralympic Games."

Last night in Whistler, as the athletes came through the village and were cheered by the people of Whistler for all they have given us, you couldn't help but feel a sense of pride for what Canada has given the world. Thanks to the Olympics and the Paralympics, we've remembered who we are. We've remembered what we can accomplish. I'm sure all of us – our families, our children and those who will follow – will be able to touch back to the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games and say: "We can be better when we work together."

Thank you, Hon. Speaker, and thank you to the Paralympians.