

Premier Christy Clark speaks at the Economic Club in Toronto

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I've been on the road for the past week. Early in the week, I was in Yellowknife for the Western Premiers' conference to talk about securing economic growth, followed by a full day in Ottawa to promote issues that will impact B.C.'s economic future, and next month I will be hosting all Premiers in Vancouver at the Council of Federation meeting, where we can showcase BC's focus on Asian markets.

Since becoming Premier, I've been working hard to deliver change to B.C. politics. I've spent a lot of time listening to British Columbians. You know what people tell me they want most? Jobs! So my government is refocusing its efforts to encourage investment to create good, stable jobs that help build good, stable families.

I think it's important for people to understand, the economy isn't just an abstract concept. It isn't about statistics and graphs. It's about people - about families, about turning the conversations I've had this week - and the people in this room have every day - into real, tangible improvements in people's lives.

Economic prospects are vitally important to how someone experiences life. The economy doesn't just support the services people value, like health care and education, it gives them a sense of hope and optimism for the future. So that's what I believe my main job as Premier is to put families first by creating high-quality and sustainable jobs.

These days in our global economy, in order to secure job growth at home, I sometimes end up tilling the soil far away. That brings me to why I am here today. I want you to know British Columbia is THE place in Canada to invest. We are the strategic link between the growing Asia Pacific markets and the western United States. No matter which way you look: British Columbia is the gateway to opportunity.

There's a universal myth in Canada - and any sixth grader can confirm this for you - that the federal government helped build the trans-Canada railway to unify the nation. And while that sounds lovely, it is not entirely true. The truth is that Canadian Pacific, the company that built the railway, wanted to connect to markets in the Asia Pacific. Only back then they referred to it as "the Far East". They knew the national dream could only be realized by allowing B.C. to fulfill its role as the nexus point between the old world and the new. It's been a dream more than a century in the making but B.C. is poised to fully capitalize on its strategic role.

We are starting to see business grow because of our proximity to Asian markets. In the last three years, B.C.'s exports to China have doubled and it has now become our second-largest export market. Our commodities and goods are being exported faster than ever.

The economic crisis of 2008 was a clarion call in this country: we need to keep our U.S. markets while moving fast in the Asia Pacific. Up to that point, our pursuit of opportunities was steady and we'd made what I'd call 'good' progress in developing markets in the Asia Pacific. But when our U.S. markets fell out from under us, 'good' simply wasn't good enough.

The economic volatility that shocked Canada and the world was a call to action. And my hope is that two simple words echo across Rockies and are heard by all of Canada, especially here in Toronto: Look West. The opportunity to build a stronger foundation for Canadian economy lies with British Columbia.

I believe our connection to the Asia Pacific is - and will be for decades - the most powerful force to shape the prosperity of Canada. Let us be united and single-minded in our pursuit of the markets there.

My government is developing a blueprint to make sure this pursuit is grounded in a plan. There are three parts to that plan:

First, making sure we are properly 'selling' ourselves as the business gateway between the New World and the Even Newer World. It has to be abundantly clear we are stable, reliable and 'open for business', with a long-term commitment to both markets.

Secondly, making all governments in Canada focus and work smart to leverage opportunities for all Canadians.

And finally, making sure all citizens of Canada hear the call of these opportunities and capitalize on them to the fullest possible extent - including Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

I don't know how many of you are aware, but in British Columbia, because of our time zone, you can do business on three different continents on any given day. You can start your morning off with a jog through Stanley Park and then some phone calls to Europe; focus on your U.S. connections over a cheeseburger for lunch, and connect with your Asian business colleagues in the evening from the comfort of the den in your home.

We truly are the nexus point between the East and West. And it is in the West - across the Pacific - where economies are growing fastest. China is poised to become the world's largest economy. India's middle class, today, is 10 times the size of the entire Canadian population - and the country's set to become the world's third largest economy by 2020.

Let's not forget Japan, an important trading partner. Japan is struggling now, but recovery from the earthquake and tsunami will happen.

We have to go where the markets are growing and secure a foothold now. And when I say "We", I don't mean B.C.. I mean everybody in this great country. British Columbia is

putting a special focus on sectors where we can leverage and grow our competitive strengths.

We have the good fortune of some remarkable assets that cannot be replicated. B.C. is home to a high quality of life, a growing economy, and a well-educated workforce. People want to live in B.C. We have exceptional publicly-funded health care, a great education system, and highly competitive tax rates.

And we have an abundance of natural resources, and markets that need them... Copper and coal make up 80 per cent of B.C.'s mineral production. Copper, which is used for technology products like Internet cable, has increased in price by 300 per cent since 2009. And our steel-making coal is helping forge the largest urbanization that has ever happened: China has to build a city the size of Toronto every year to keep up with its growth.

B.C.'s mining competitiveness benefits from its low cost electricity and natural gas, its strategic ports with rail access on the Pacific Ocean, and an extensive road network. And Vancouver is becoming an international centre for mining engineering, law and financing.

For an economy our size, B.C. is also punching above its weight in the clean-tech sector, proportionately we are the highest in Canada. Given the interests of both the U.S. and Asia Pacific countries in meeting their international climate commitments, B.C. has begun to secure a position as a global centre of clean technology innovation.

Technology is also changing things in a big way in our natural gas industry. We are unlocking huge reserves of unconventional gas. And we are supporting industry efforts to open new markets: liquefied natural gas global trade is expected to increase by 50 per cent.

For business, a focused strategy is what you do every day. It should be for government too. That's why our government is refocusing our economic development strategy. To create jobs and support B.C. families. When it comes to an economic development plan, our opportunities may be all over the globe, but our strategy can't be all over the map. Our strong economic policy for tomorrow will be grounded in the strong, balanced fiscal policy that has been the foundation of our success for this past decade.

Yes, we need to continue with balanced budgets, keeping taxes low, renewing our focus on deregulation. We also want to be focused and seize the best opportunities that will bring that first dollar into our economy. So we have a lot of work ahead of us.

I will be leading a trade mission to Asia later this year. Looking west, and helping business turn ambitions and efforts into jobs back home takes legwork. We all need to be pulling together. And our thinking needs to keep evolving needs to keep evolving.

A big part of why I'm in Toronto today - and yesterday in Ottawa - is to ensure the federal government is aware of our priorities and our desire to work together. B.C. is open to new jobs and we are open for business.

If we are going to seize on the opportunities that exist in the west, governments need to be on the same page and supporting business. For example, we need a streamlined environmental assessment process. In Ottawa, I spoke about the need for governments to continue to invest in our West Coast ports and the infrastructure needed to get the products to those ports.

They are the closest North American ports to Asia, but they must also be the most efficient and able to handle more marine cargo if we are to maximize on the tremendous geographic advantage we have. I also spoke about the need to improve the flow of goods across our border to US markets - primarily goods coming from and destined to our ports. I raised this issue with the American Ambassador David Jacobson two weeks ago in Surrey.

British Columbia, like Ontario (and especially here in Toronto), has incredibly strong, bedrock Asian communities with immense personal, cultural and business connections throughout the Asia Pacific region. Immigration is very important to B.C. - to all provinces. These connections build more than a trade bond. They represent a more powerful and enduring human bond.

We've had tremendous success through our Provincial Nominee Program in attracting foreign investment and skilled workers. We need the numbers of spaces in that program increased. Because long before any capital is invested in our economy, or any container ship docks at our ports, there is the hard work of nurturing relationships that lead to trade that creates jobs for all Canadian families.

In British Columbia, and throughout much of Canada, our diversity is more than a mere asset to us. It's not just nice to have. It is 'who we are', and 'who we are' matters. Together, we have to leverage our identity and forge new bonds in the Asia Pacific and at home.

Earlier I mentioned that quaint, out-of-date term, 'the Far East'. Turns out, I might have jumped the gun on that. I'm not saying Central Canadians don't pay attention to the West, but an April poll commissioned by the Asia Pacific Foundation showed a 15 per cent drop (from 59 per cent to 44 per cent) in the number of Canadians who view China as important to this country's prosperity. In fact, this downward trend held true for all Asian economies.

Canadians, particularly on this side of the country, don't see Canada as part of the Asia Pacific region. Only 26 per cent of Ontarians see it that way. And the balance of opinion on the growing economic importance of China has shifted among Canadians. A larger portion of Canadians now see China as a threat... A THREAT, rather than an economic

opportunity. This is shocking given that our commodities are helping Asia fuel the biggest urbanization experienced in the history of the world.

If I might say, Canadians need to wake up to two important facts. First, we already have important connections to the Asia Pacific. Ontario imports goods such as electronics, and vehicle parts from China, Japan and South Korea which enter through B.C. ports. Those goods arrive in container ships in Vancouver or the Port of Prince Rupert and are transferred to rail cars for the journey east.

Your Asia Pacific connection is critical to families in Alliston, Ontario, whose livelihood at the Honda plant depends on the smooth and efficient delivery of component parts from Japan so that the final product can be assembled here in Canada. It is equally crucial to the families who work at the Toyota plant in Woodstock who rely on the worldwide supply chain that makes just-in-time manufacturing possible.

Second, Central Canada needs to look west at the opportunities available and what they could mean to communities and businesses in Ontario. Canada is not just an Atlantic country, it's also a Pacific country. And in the next century, the Pacific is where the growth opportunities will be. British Columbia is already building relationships that are profound, deep and real. There's an opportunity for the country to embrace that. It means a lot to families in B.C. and across the west, but really, the whole country benefits.

In conclusion, I want to say that in B.C. we are building Canada's future. Not just B.C.'s future, but Canada's.

We want you to join us.

I am determined to deliver on the promise of opportunity for my province - not just for B.C., but for all of Canada. But it takes focus - finding those sectors that can make an impact in those massive markets and giving businesses the support they need to gain traction and capitalize.

There is still a lot more to do and learn. We are not the only country that wants to secure strong trade ties with Asia's growing economies. We face stiff competition around the world. We cannot spend any more time studying or analyzing. Our time has come.

Despite all the numbers and progress our performance is still 'good', as I said, when it comes to responding to the opportunities we have as a gateway to the US and Asia Pacific. Good won't cut it. We want to be great.

Because being great translates into stable jobs and strong families like those in Alliston - and it translates into revenues to fund our schools, build roads, fix infrastructure and keep our health care system afloat.

It will come from working together to send a unified message to those growing countries in the Asia Pacific. Greatness will come when governments support creative, energetic businesses and when we learn from business to focus our efforts.

And it will come from strong, personal, cultural and commercial relationships that allow opportunities to grow.

Join us: Look West. We are at the crossroads of opportunity. Together we can deliver on what really matters: building a better future for our children and grandchildren, all across Canada.