

AME BC: The Association for Mineral Exploration British Columbia speech

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12:00 PM

Gavin, thank you, Gavin came up with a great slogan last year, you'll remember, we built this city on rock and coal. And a mine is a terrible thing to waste. The NDPs had mining on the rocks. There are a couple ways to put mining on the rocks, we know.

One of them is if commodity prices are too low and there's been a long down cycle for commodity industries around the world for a while now. But not just this year or in recent years, it's been over many, many, years as British Columbians have founded communities and built families on the mining industry in smaller communities around the province. Look at the Golden Triangle up near Stewart.

That had a gold-silver mine in it 100 years ago. It was the most significant source of silver and gold in Canada. It made Stewart the centre of the world and, of course, that didn't last when commodity prices went down. But Stewart's back in a big way, the whole region is back in a big way, and one of the reasons that we see the mining industry of BC coming back is because we've seen commodity prices come back but we have also seen, I think, thoughtful, responsive, government policy.

I'm not saying that because I want to argue for what I've done, I want to argue for the work of Bill Bennett, our minister responsible for Mining. The most passionate, determined, advocate, and champion for the mining industry that this country has had in a very long time as our Minister of Mining.

You know he's going home to Cranbrook to spend a little

bit more time with his family, no one can argue with that after all the years he spent in public service. But, I think, on behalf of all of you, I want to take a second to say thank you Bill Bennett for what you have done for mining families, mining communities, and for our economy here in BC as Mining minister.

You've always got to have somebody in the cabinet who's going to swing for a knockout every time and that is Bill Bennett, absolutely, and I'm really going to miss you around the cabinet table, Bill. I know you won't go very far but I think we're going to miss you and we'll probably see you at these conferences because I know you're not giving up on mining anytime soon. Now, when you think about what Bill has done in permitting for mining, as an example, he's cut it in half, the time you have to wait to get a permit from 110 days to around 50.

We've seen the Major Mines Permitting Office undertake a major reform which is now allowing them to collaborate between ministries in mine planning, rather than having mining decisions made in different silos across government that, frankly, just has taken way, way, too long. He's worked with you to try and keep mines open in tough times with exploration tax credits, with low hydro rates, the ability to defer hydro power costs, making sure that we are there for you until commodity prices find their way back up.

And, now, thanks to Bill's advocacy, we are extending the flow-through share tax credit, a non-refundable tax credit of 20%. And when Bill brings these things to cabinet, he makes it absolutely clear that this is what you want, this is what industry needs. He has also made the case for Geoscience BC. We have put about \$60m into Geoscience BC since 2005. Every single dollar has been an incredibly good investment because it returns five times plus over to the BC economy and that's one of the reasons we have

become the premier destination for mining exploration in North America.

A fifth of all exploration in Canada happens here and that's why over the next two years we're committing another \$10m to Geoscience BC so that they can continue to do their work and attract mining exploration to our province. Because that work is part of the stability that we need in the mining business and in communities across the province. When I think about stability, I'm really thinking about families who depend on the jobs and the income.

The monthly, the weekly, cheques that they get in order to look after the people that they love in the communities in which they live. The work that mining companies and entrepreneurs do, and the businesses that you support through your work does in making sure communities succeed. The hospitals, the roads, the schools, that mining has built over the years and is going to continue to build. We need mining in BC. You are crucial part of Canada's national economy, and increasingly BC is the most important part of the Canadian economy.

Four consecutive balanced budgets with a fifth one on the way in a few weeks. We are number one in Canada in economic growth. We are growing three times faster than anywhere else in the country. We are on track to eliminate our operating debt for the first time in BC since 1975. We have the lowest middle class taxes in Canada, we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, the lowest it's been compared to the rest of the country since 1961. We have the best job creation record: 191,000 jobs, 82% of them full-time.

We have, today, had our triple-A, the only provincial triple-A credit rating in Canada, reconfirmed by Moody's,

with some reference to the fact that our government has had the most stable fiscal management in the country and a long strong record of doing so. And, earlier today, we released our next five-year plan update on the Jobs Plan and that is focusing on two things in particular.

One, on rural communities, because we see in this low commodities cycle, with gas prices, with oil prices, commodity prices in the mining sector, and with the forest industry seeing some struggles as well, we've seen rural communities fall behind in terms of growth where they should be compared to urban ones. And that means we have to support those communities better and help them bear some of the brunt of the economic risk that we see unfolding around us, not just around the world, but also now increasingly down south of the border.

We are number one in growth and we intend to stay that way. We've had a plan since 2011 and we've stuck to it with real determination. This was once called the most hostile jurisdiction in North America when it came to mining. And I believe that one of the most important things that government leaders can do, if we want to encourage mining, it starts with your attitude and your culture. Governments need to be proud of mining. We need to be cheerleaders and champions for mining. In BC, we have this unique opportunity to tell people around the world that our mining industry is the safest, the most environmentally sustainable, and the most highly technological, of any mining business, from any country, anywhere in the world.

When your governments are proud of the work you do, it makes it easier for you to do that work. It means that across government we can work to transform the culture so that we are one where we are making sure that we do what we need to do help you get to your goals. That hasn't been easy, even with Bill Bennett, Canada's best

mining minister, it is sometimes a struggle to change government culture. But we are doing it and we are going to continue to do it.

Bill and others in his ministry have been doing things like supporting the work that is going on today up in the Golden Triangle. Look at Brucejack, 900 people working on construction right now. When it's running, 300 more permanent, good paying jobs. The mine is on Nisga'a territory with a cooperation and benefits agreement. Look at Red Chris powered by the Northwest Transmission Line. When we started building that, our critics said it was line to nowhere.

Well, today, it's a line to 350 jobs at Red Chris where people are working. It's a line to the Tahltan, the First Nations community that also has an economic benefits agreement and is seeing some of those jobs and that revenue coming into their community. And here we are in the beautiful world City of Vancouver where you see a little bit of that future unfolding in the tech industry, a tech sector that needs you.

This binary division that people make between good clean jobs and the tech sector and jobs that aren't so clean in the resource sector is just plain wrong. The tech sector needs the mining industry more than it ever has. You can't build an iPad without metallurgical coal. You can't lay broadband Internet without copper. The goods that we mine here in BC, sustainably, safely, are goods that the world needs more than it ever has so that we can continue to reach new heights, new discoveries, and make breakthroughs that are going to continue to transform the direction of the human race.

Now last I'll just finish with this because you all know that -- some of you may if you're from BC you'll know that we have a big shareholders meeting coming up on May 9th

this year. The thing about elections is it really is the perfect time for all of us to go back and look at the values that we hold, to look inside ourselves and think hard about what it is we stand for and what we want to stand for. It's a moment in time where we get a chance to think purposefully not just about who we are now but about who we want to be.

So, in that shareholders meeting we're going to have two or three visions of where BC will be in five, ten, fifty years. Our vision is going to be one that celebrates the role that the mining industry will play in building the future of our province. Our vision will one that includes being proud of the work that you do, fighting for it, championing it, telling people the story of what you have accomplished and what you do to build our province every single day because we are number one today in economic growth.

There will be other parties out there making a different argument. I mean, I have to remind you the NDP were number one in the 1990s for one thing and that was getting thank you cards from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, but we want to be number one in mining. We want to be number one in growth and we want to be number one in making sure we're putting people to work. That's going to be the story that we'll tell about where we want BC to be in the decades to come. That means we're going to fight for this plan. We're going to fight for your businesses. We're going to fight for the jobs that you create. Now more than ever when we look around the world and see the uncertainty that is emerging in economies south of us, to the east of us and to the west, now more than ever BC and the BC mining business needs a fighter.