

Premier Christy Clark: Swearing-in Speech
March 14, 2011

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Christy Clark: Thank you, your honour, thank you, distinguished guests, and most importantly today, my fellow British Columbians. It's wonderful to be here with you today as we gather on the traditional territory of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations. I'm honoured to be joined here by the leaders of many British Columbia First Nations, and I know that you share my commitment to continuing to strengthen our relationship and our shared economic opportunities.

To begin with, I'd also like to say a few words to our friends, the people of Japan. People across B.C. have sister-city relationships with communities in Japan. They include communities from Abbotsford to Quesnel. These relationships strengthen the bonds between our peoples, bonds that have never been more important than they are today. And I ask all British Columbians to donate to the Red Cross to assist our Japanese friends in this time of such extraordinary need. Cabinet will be considering also assistance on behalf of the people of our province to support Japan as they continue to deal with this terrible catastrophe.

Today I am truly humbled to be taking office as your premier - and proud to be leading a talented and committed Cabinet and Caucus. This is a smaller Cabinet, one that will be focused on a few key priorities. The reduced size of the Cabinet reflects a renewed commitment to being respectful to British Columbians by being frugal with the hard-earned tax dollars that they provide to government. But today we are doing more than simply swearing in a new Cabinet.

Today we are charting a new course for British Columbia. Premier Campbell was successful in forging a coalition of interests and perspectives together that produced great progress for our people. Our coalition will continue to thrive so that British Columbia can meet the economic, social, and fiscal pressures that face our great province.

Our new government recognizes that this is time for a change - change in what we do to make life better for British Columbians, and also change in how we govern. We are blessed in this province by natural splendour and a wealth of economic resources. And we have made great progress. Now it is time for our government to reach out to those families for whom the great promise of British Columbia may have remained elusive. And that work starts now.

Our government will put B.C. families at the centre of all of our decision-making. This will reflect the priorities of citizens because family is at the centre, after all, of each of our lives - the children that we nurture, the parents that we care for, the relatives that we count on, the partners we share our hopes and dreams with, however we choose to define family in our own lives. Like the boundless diversity of our province, families are defined in many, many different ways. But they are all bound together by love - and an unshakeable commitment to supporting each other and therefore making our community stronger.

Our government recognizes that the economy is not an abstract thing. It exists to create jobs and to sustain families and sustain communities. And today we must renew our focus on job creation in our province. Low to middle-income earning families, particularly in rural communities, are struggling to keep up. Good jobs are the foundation of strong families, and this government will be tireless in looking for ways to strengthen every aspect of our economy in every corner of our province, building an economy that works for every citizen, wherever they are.

Today we are creating a new ministry called Jobs, Tourism, and Innovation. We are bringing together many functions within government to focus on creating the conditions that help business create jobs - green jobs, resource sector jobs, service sector jobs, jobs in the trades. We will put a particular emphasis on making sure prosperity and opportunity extend to rural B.C. Creating a strong and growing economy is also the single most important thing that we can do to provide funding for those services that are vital to all of us - health care, education, and all of the other services of government.

Creating jobs is one important thing that we can do to strengthen families, but it is not the only thing that we can do. Our government will ask this question with every decision we face: How does it affect families, and will it make families stronger? In the coming days and weeks, you will see real and tangible steps that benefit families, and I hope you will let us know what you think of them. And more importantly, I hope you'll engage and partner with us to help us tackle the challenges we face as a province.

Today, this is the first Cabinet swearing-in that is being streamed live on the Internet. And admittedly it's a small step to bring government operations into the sunlight and to use technology to bring us together. There will be lots more steps coming - steps that will engage citizens and decision-making as never before. We will listen and in exchange I will ask British Columbians to get involved - to make yourselves heard and to give us your best ideas. Our government will be open to the people of British Columbia. We will talk about our problems; we will set our priorities openly; and we will work with citizens to find solutions. And we will explain why we make the decisions that we do. You may not always agree with us and all the decisions that we make, but to the greatest degree possible, you won't be surprised at the course that we take, and you will know for certain why we've chosen it.

We'll work within a commitment to keeping B.C. on a stable and prudent financial course. We'll focus on core principles. Protecting health care by making sure high-quality services are available to patients when and where they need them; patients depend on us to ensure that they have access to health care providers and services in every corner of British Columbia. Our government will support our providers and we'll focus on the areas of highest need, including support for those with mental health and addictions challenges.

Our government will also invest in helping the least fortunate through tax incentives for the working poor and other steps that I will outline in coming weeks. We'll focus on non-profit groups to give them the support they need to strengthen our society because they create an incredible sense of community that makes each of our lives richer, no matter where we live.

And putting families first also has to mean focusing on education - with passion, with energy, and with real commitment. Our government will do this with an approach that says innovation shouldn't start when you go on to post-secondary education; it has to start in kindergarten. My commitment to education started at home. My dad was a public school teacher. And to this day, I still meet people who benefited from the incredible passion he brought to the classroom and the intense focus he put on each child as an individual. He believed, as I do, that every student has talent - no matter what their family income, no matter what their circumstance, and no matter where they're from.

In many ways, education is the fuel of our progress as a society, and that means that teachers are the engines. I want to work with our teachers to build a bright and hopeful future for families, one student at a time. In government, as in our schools, we need every member of the team fully engaged, giving their best, and contributing the most.

Over the last two weeks, I have met with every single government MLA, and I am convinced that each one will make an important contribution to our government's agenda, and more importantly, in making sure that their constituencies' concerns are heard at the centre of power in Victoria.

We also have a talented and diverse public service, and I intend to harness the power and creativity of the 30,000 people who work for the people of British Columbia, along with the people who work in our hospitals, schools, colleges, and universities. You have so much to give B.C. - so much to give families - and our Cabinet will be encouraging you to commit and offer your energy and ideas at every opportunity. I also extend this invitation to the diverse populations that make up B.C. Our population's diversity is not simply an asset or something that's nice to have. It is who we are.

I am determined that when British Columbians look at their government, they will see themselves reflected back: their values, their stories, their unique ways of looking at the world. Our government belongs to all British Columbians, whether you are new to Canada, an Aboriginal Canadian, a rural or an urban Canadian, young or old, you have a major contribution to make to this province. May our work together help build a better British Columbia. This is going to be an exciting time - a time of renewal for B.C. families, a time when we work together as partners to build the British Columbia that we all know is possible.

Let's get started. Thank you.