

Speaking Notes

**The Honourable David L. Emerson
Minister of Industry**

**Address to the Liberal Party of Canada in BC
Annual Banquet**

**Penticton, British Columbia
November 13, 2004**

Check Against Delivery

Thank You.

It's been a great day and a great convention.

As most of you know, this is my first political convention of any kind!

I have been talking with delegates throughout the day from all corners of the province and I am encouraged. By the diversity of our party. By the representation of young people. By the energy and passion that you bring to political life in BC. There is a massive commitment in this room to making British Columbia and Canada a better place.

I feel a buzz ... a great feeling of renewal and optimism about our future in Canada, but particularly here in BC.

Interestingly, the PM sensed the BC potential long ago, and he has turned his hunch into action, many times over... and here he is again today!

One thing is clear... Prime Minister is committed to ending the alienation from national affairs that has shaped and plagued Western political attitudes for many decades.

I would like to thank all of you for taking the time to attend the Convention, and for your passionate commitment to the Liberal Party of Canada. I know that I, for one, could not have been elected without the hard-working volunteers in Vancouver Kingsway. On behalf of my caucus colleagues, thank you for your hard work in last June's election. And thank you in advance for the cascading grassroots campaigns that will take us to an even higher plateau in the next election.

This Convention would not have hit the sweet spot the inspired work and dedication of the volunteers who devoted countless hours to making it a success. Thank you volunteers one and all! "Brother" Dave Haggard and Ginny Hasselfield, the co-chairs, you've done a great job. Thank you!

To Bill Cunningham and the outgoing provincial executive, thank you for your magnificent leadership during an always exciting, at times chaotic year.

I would also like to recognize my colleagues in the BC Caucus. I would put the knowledge, wisdom and experience of our formidable team up against any in the country... any time!

They have been very kind to the “Grey Haired” rookie – whether it’s showing me where the washrooms are on the Hill, counselling me on the intricacies of Parliamentary procedure, or getting me medical assistance to combat the flu. They’ve been there. I thank them.

And we are all fortunate to have the wise, veteran leadership of Senator Jack Austin. If Jack Austin hasn’t seen it before... It has never happened in Ottawa! To experience of Hedy Fry, Stephen Owen, Keith Martin, Raymond Chan, Senator Fitzpatrick and Senator Jaffer, and you have incredible depth.

Caucus Chair Don Bell you bring enormous energy to the cause. Your considerable local government experience and the work you’re is doing to build networks with mayors and councillors across the province will be a critical asset. For all of us, thank you.

A word or two about Ujjal Dossanjh... my seatmate in both the House of Commons and cabinet. Ujjal has instincts and perspective that can only be acquired from sitting in the premier’s chair. He sees the play unfolding in ways I can only dream of. He’s inevitably 3 steps ahead of me... of course it’s possible I’m 2 steps behind everybody else.

I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to David Anderson. For over thirty-five years, David has been a leader of the Liberal Party in BC. He has been there through thick and thin. His core values, his priorities and his integrity were unwavering. Regardless of adversity, David stood up for the Liberal Party and helped shape and reflect its ideals. Thank you David.

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I want to say again that the Prime Minister’s attendance here today sends a strong message. The message is one of consistency and commitment. The message is born of a pattern of behaviour, actions and decisions. He has made it clear that tackling BC alienation is a key part of his mission as prime minister. He knows one trip doesn’t do it. He knows we need to establish a pattern. He knows we need to reprogram doubters and cynics in this province... and he’s right!

He worked relentlessly in the last election to demonstrate to British Columbians that electing Liberal MPs west of the Rockies was a priority. We all remember his dash from coast to coast on the eve of the election, finally dipping his toe in the waters off Steveston near midnight.

He encouraged and supported our Made in BC Agenda. He told us to fight for what's right for British Columbia.

He appointed five BC ministers to Cabinet – boosting BC's clout out of proportion to our number of seats.

He brought the entire federal cabinet to Kelowna in September and he joined us here today.

The Prime Minister has more than lived up to his pledge to give us a greater say in the government of Canada.

Now, it's time for us to respond. Only one response will do. We need to elect more Liberals in the next election. We need to become the federal party of choice for British Columbians.

We are starting from a strong position. Although the last campaign was tough for Liberals across Canada, we can say with some pride that BC played a major part in the Liberal win.

Never once did we buckle.

Never once did we stop believing.

Never once did we waver. We stayed the course.

Ultimately, we did something that has seldom been done here in BC – we held our vote from the start of the campaign until the end.

Historically, so I'm told, the vote would collapse after the drop of the writ. We beat back an aggressive attack from the NDP, attempting as usual to cash in on protest votes.

Nowhere was that more true than in Vancouver-Kingsway, where they tried to convince the voters that the federal election was a referendum on Gordon Campbell.

And on the right flank we were not left in the dust by the Conservatives... as in past campaigns.

Let's hear a round of support and appreciation for Mark Marissen and his campaign team.

Our increase of three seats was remarkable accomplishment in an election where we faced losses everywhere else in Canada.

Despite our gains, there is much more to be done. There should be no assumption of Conservative dominance in the future. There are still seats we can take from the NDP.

We have built a beach head of eight seats. But there are 28 other seats to fight for, and they are fights we can win.

Our vote is concentrated in the Vancouver area, and in Greater Victoria.

We are competitive but not winning in the suburbs.

While we had spirited campaigns and excellent candidates elsewhere, we didn't convert in many.

It's not our volunteers or party members that failed us. You have worked hard in the face of adversity for many years.

The reality is the Liberal brand has taken a beating in recent years. In much of BC we're still not connecting.

We need to understand why.

Why aren't we doing better in places like Lillooet, Quesnel, and Golden?

A good part of it relates to our positioning on issues, much of it baggage from governments that were in power over 20 years ago.

Hot button issues: the gun registry and the sponsorship issue turned a lot of people off. Many British Columbians believe we have been eager to explain to explain and rationalize Ottawa to BC... when what they want is aggressive advocacy for BC in Ottawa. Still others see us as the urban, big city cappuccino set... but out of touch with smaller, remote and rural communities.

Many in this province depend on land and resources to feed and educate their kids. They worry our priorities are elsewhere, DFO, Softwood, and so on. I don't believe it has to be that way. I believe we can offer a compelling vision to all people in regions of BC.

In my various incarnations I've spent a lot of time in Prince George, Houston, Fort St. James, Fort St. John, Prince Rupert, Terrace, Cranbrook and dozens of other communities. The workers, the small business owners, and the community leaders have the same fundamental needs as urban Canadians.

They want dependable health care.

They want environmental protection.

They want a good education for their kids.

They want secure jobs, and they want a local future for their kids.

They want fair-minded and balanced government, that will bring people together, whether to pursue economic development or address key social concerns.

They want prudence and integrity in the way government manages taxpayers' hard-earned money. They want us to balance the budget. They want us to invest surpluses wisely.

They have a sense of compassion for those in society who are vulnerable, through circumstances out of their control. British Columbians do not want people left behind.

They believe in equality – equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, equality under the law... they believe in social justice.

These are widely held beliefs, here in BC, and across Canada. I'm an optimistic Liberal because those are my beliefs.

And I am Liberal because those are Liberal beliefs.

We believe in an inclusive, forward-looking society... one in which people can thrive on individual initiative, but where we protect those in need.

We believe a strong sustainable economy must do the heavy lifting required by a progressive social agenda.

We reject the politics of division, that pits one part of society against another.

We reject politics that would play on latent resentments for political gain.

We reject the snake oil of utopian dreams that cannot be realised.

The Conservative Party and NDP have a lot in common.

They are both trapped and confined by ideology, an ideology that precludes many of middle-of-the-road, moderate solutions to the challenges Canada faces today. Their narrow focus shrinks their political base. They are drawn to policy extremes that divide, rather than unify.

I look at the Conservative Party, and the way they have exploited negative sentiments in BC. There has been no positive vision or strategy.

Are BC's issues top of mind in Ottawa because of all those Conservative MPs?
No.

I see it every day, day after day, in question period... it's the politics of smear.

Clearly, despite their numbers from BC, the leadership of the Conservative Party is more focused on Eastern Canada than ever before.

On the left, the NDP and their leader continue to stretch their credibility. They put forward fanciful spending plans without any strategy as to how we would pay for them. For the NDP, there's never been a problem you couldn't solve with higher taxes, despite a long history of economic destruction in every real life experiment they have tried.

NDP social promises are simply a mirage that disappears if get too close.

It used to be said that the only thing we could count on was death and taxes, but Jack Layton tried to make it a triple play: death, taxes, and "death taxes". Their plan was dead on arrival. But it reinforces the fact that the NDP social Utopia has no economic foundation and can never be achieved... It's just a mirage in an intellectual and political desert, bereft of workable ideas.

So, we have a Conservative Party without a social heart and soul and a left wing party with no economic foundation.

Both parties are narrow, extreme, and out of step with mainstream British Columbians.

Ironically, that is their gift to the Liberal Party of Canada. They have given us a wide path down the centre... and it's a path more and more British Columbians will choose to travel.

Look at our team – we had the broadest and most diverse group of candidates of any party in BC. I was proud to stand on a podium, as a former Forestry Executive, with the former head of the IWA, Dave Haggard. It was encouraging to see a former NDP premier alongside a former Reform MP. First Nations leader, municipal leaders, people from all walks of life.

Our candidates express who we are as a party – the Liberal Party invites all segments of society to weave a powerful middle of the road consensus.

But we have a lot of work to do. But we have a great product and need to rebuild the brand in BC.

We need to make an extra effort in the limited time ahead to reach out to people. In their homes, at their community centres, in their gathering places. We need to reinvigorate one of the central missions of a political party – to be a meeting place of ideas an integrator of citizens into the political process. We need to be the agent that creates strength from diversity.

We need to open our doors to British Columbians to work with us on the Made in BC Agenda.

Make no mistake.

The Made in BC Agenda is our covenant with the voters of BC.

We must, and we will deliver, but it has to be evergreen. This agenda cannot be frozen in time. It is a living, breathing document that must be constantly improved and updated to reflect our ever changing circumstances.

It must speak to the aspirations of all British Columbians, whether they are urban or rural, young or old, male or female.

Our political success won't come from windy speeches and dreams of seats. It will come from delivering for the people of British Columbia.

It will come from demonstrating in actions and outcomes that we, far better than other parties, will provide sound, substantive and responsible government.

The RAV Line, 2010 Olympics, the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Kicking Horse Pass highway upgrade, the Port of Prince Rupert... these are important priorities we are delivering on.

We have delivered on returning the GST to BC communities. And the balance of the "New Deal for Cities and Communities" will provide for positive, environmentally sustainable on our transformation where people live.

And we are turning our attention to northern and rural areas. I predict the next 10 to 20 years will see massive momentum in the north and among aboriginal communities. And it will be a vision developed and led by the Government of Canada.

We will see an unleashing of vast untapped potential. And we're going to technologically connect widely scattered communities to mainstream social and economic opportunities.

We are also forging ahead with a strategy to take Canadian competitiveness to a new level. We are a trading nation and we need to be good at it... We need to lead the world!

The key is to deliver results for British Columbia and Canada. When we deliver, we'll be rewarded with more seats. We're on a compressed timetable, which means we have to work harder and faster. But it's there for us.

I ran for office because I wanted to get things done in BC. My colleagues have left medical practices, given up successful careers and business opportunities. Most importantly, they have given up family time they will never be able to replace. We are all there because we want a better British Columbia and a better Canada.

That job is made easier knowing that we have your support, and that you are actively developing and implementing this agenda with us. And you are developing and improving the quality of our organization in every riding. Let's not forget one thing. The first priority of government must always be the next generation.

Every morning, at schools across British Columbia – like Trudeau Elementary in Vancouver Kingsway - the Canadian flag is unfurled and raised. It is our responsibility to ensure that the flag of Canada touches off the wellspring of images and emotions that will inspire kids throughout BC to commit to building Canada's future.

By strengthening BC's place in Canada, by working together to deliver an agenda that is meaningful to BC families, we will strengthen Canada in the eyes of British Columbians, particularly young people.

Fellow delegates, that is an agenda worth fighting for.

Thank you.