
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Small Business and Revenue

SMALL BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE HIGHLIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES

PENTICTON – Ensuring a competitive taxation climate, recruiting skilled labour, providing educational courses on entrepreneurship to students, simplifying provincial sales tax and continuing to pursue regulatory reform are among the priorities identified during the first series of Small Business Roundtable sessions, Rick Thorpe, Minister of Small Business and Revenue and Minister Responsible for Regulatory Reform, said today.

Thorpe, who chairs the Small Business Roundtable, discussed the results of the first 18 consultation sessions at a roundtable members meeting in Penticton.

“Over the last five months, we have heard from 228 small business owners, ranging from retailers to accountants, and from farmers to loggers,” said Thorpe. “At every location, we’ve heard business is booming, and we’ve also heard what the priorities of the small business community are.”

Every session included discussion of how small business is managing economic growth and the need for more skilled labour, as well as how government should continue to invest in education and training to meet the future needs of small business.

Thorpe noted government is already responding, with a \$400-million commitment in Budget 2006 to expand education and training initiatives. This includes \$90 million over three years to develop a new system of tax credits, \$39 million extra to expand and support apprenticeship training and \$3 million to help at-risk youth gain valuable construction training and apprenticeships.

On May 18, Premier Gordon Campbell, along with Thorpe, announced a \$2-million grant to Junior Achievement of British Columbia. This will support expanded entrepreneurship, small business and trades education for students in grades 3 to 12 and increase the involvement of business leaders and entrepreneurs in these programs.

“Small business owners told us students need opportunities to learn about small business and consider entrepreneurship and trades as part of their future,” said Thorpe. “Junior Achievement has a 50-year track record of providing these opportunities through quality information, tools and mentoring, and we’re investing to build on their success.”

In addition to these suggestions, small businesses also shared their thoughts regarding the streamlining and simplification of provincial sales tax. These were referred to the Provincial Sales Tax Review, which began in November 2005 and accepted submissions until May 18. Government is now reviewing the submissions with the goal of developing revenue-neutral options to change provincial sales tax policies, legislation and related administrative processes to streamline, simplify and enhance the fairness of the tax.

Roundtable participants also recommended government continue to invest in infrastructure improvements, including those supporting resource extraction industries. Over the next three years, the Province will invest \$3.9 billion in projects like Phase 2 of the Kicking Horse Canyon Project and the William R. Bennett Bridge in Kelowna. This year's budget also provided \$129 million to upgrade roads, lengthen the winter drilling season and support enhanced environmental stewardship initiatives in oil and gas exploration areas.

Participants at sessions throughout British Columbia's Interior identified the ongoing need for creative solutions to mitigate the impact of the mountain pine beetle infestation. Budget 2006 added \$113 million to support increased beetle timber harvest levels and reforest devastated areas.

"Small business is one of the economic engines of our thriving economy, and the roundtables are further proof government is committed to small business success," said roundtable vice-chair Kevin Evans, who is also western vice-president of Retail Council of Canada. "It's encouraging to see government is already making significant investments in the priorities roundtable participants have identified."

Many participants identified tourism as a major opportunity for small business. Thorpe noted government dedicated \$15 million in new funding for tourism initiatives, \$6 million to build Gateway tourism centres at the Peace Arch and in Merritt, and \$5 million to help develop all-season resorts and adventure tourism.

"As a former mayor, I know what a significant role small business has in our communities," said roundtable vice-chair Linda Larson. "Each community in British Columbia is unique and the Roundtable has given small businesses across British Columbia the opportunity to be heard and to strengthen their relationship with government."

"Going forward, the roundtable will work in partnership with small business and government to develop small business strategies to help us make British Columbia the most small-business-friendly jurisdiction in Canada," said Thorpe.

A photo of Minister Thorpe meeting with roundtable members on May 24 is available online at: www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=311

1 factsheet(s) attached.

Media Lisa Tees
contact: Public Affairs Officer
 250 888-3466

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