

***HONOURABLE CLAUDE RICHMOND***

***Hotel and Disabled Workers Initiative***

*April 30, 2007*

*Pan Pacific Hotel Vancouver*

*Vancouver, BC*

Good morning.

It's a pleasure to be here.

I'd like to take this opportunity to commend the Pan Pacific Vancouver for taking the lead to ensure that individuals with disabilities are fully included in the hospitality industry workforce.

I'd like to especially thank Stephen Peters, General Manager for leading the challenge "on the ground"... you are setting a great example which I hope others will follow. We know that today there are about 300,000 working-age people with disabilities in B.C. – many of whom want to work.

They are highly motivated and dedicated individuals who, in many cases, are as well-trained and educated as those without disabilities.

- 34,000 have college diplomas,
- 30,000 have trade certificates, and
- 28,000 have university degrees.

It doesn't make sense to let this talent go to waste – especially since B.C. businesses will need to fill one million new job openings by the year 2015.

Our challenge is to match employer demand in the various labour market sectors with skilled supply.... working age people with disabilities can help to fill the gap. The provincial government echos the leadership of the Pan Pacific Hotel by also working to advance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through three very important initiatives.

One... Government invests approximately \$21 million annually in employment programs and services specifically for British Columbians with disabilities. These programs provide a range of specialized services to help people with disabilities pursue their employment goals.

Two... Government launched a WorkAble Solutions website which provides an excellent meeting place to bring together qualified job seekers with disabilities with employers who have positions that need to be filled.

The site has a directory of job listings where employers can post their openings and applicants can submit their resumes and apply on-line.

Three... and the one I am particularly excited about...

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

Last fall at the Union of BC Municipalities, I – along with Mayor Sam Sullivan – had the pleasure to launch government’s 10-by-10 challenge – calling on municipal and business leaders across the province to increase the employment of people with disabilities in each community by 10 per cent by 2010.

At that time, there were approximately 132,000 people with disabilities employed in B.C. By 2010, the objective is to boost this number by 13,000 to 145,000.

So far, 27 communities have registered for the challenge.

Two weeks ago in Kamloops, government announced the \$2 million dollar Measuring Up Accessibility and Inclusion Fund.

This fund, managed by 2010 Legacies Now, will provide approximately 70 grants of up to \$25,000 across the province in support of community projects aimed at increasing accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.

As Minister of Employment and Income Assistance, I have met many persons with disabilities ...

... and I know they have tremendous talents and skills to offer employers and their communities.

With the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, and B.C.’s current economy the strongest it’s been in decades... with almost 80,000 new jobs created in B.C. in the last twelve months and the unemployment rate at a record low 3.9% ...

... there has never been a better time for persons with disabilities, as well as all British Columbians, to fully participate in the workforce.

You are taking the steps necessary to make their inclusion a reality and, for that, we thank you...

... and want to take this opportunity to appeal to every hotel in the province to follow the example set by the Pan Pacific.

Your success will lead the way for other sectors such as retail, sales and finance to follow.

And by the way... stay tuned ... in the weeks ahead we will have something exciting to announce that will further support the employment of people with disabilities and B.C.’s tourism industry – ensuring B.C. is the best place on earth to visit for everyone.

Thank-you.