

COALITION OF BC BUSINESSES

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January 20, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A0A3

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

British Columbia's ports are the heart of Asia Pacific trade for our nation and for our province.

Small businesses have a large stake in the free flow of goods through our ports. British Columbia's small businesses shipped about \$12.2 billion worth of merchandise to international destinations in 2006. That represents close to 37% of the total value of goods exported from the province.

Small business plays a major role in British Columbia's economy. British Columbia's small business GDP accounted for a third of total provincial GDP - the highest of all provinces. More than 56% of B.C.'s private-sector jobs are in small businesses.

That's why I am writing to you today – to express our concerns about the reliability of the Asia Pacific Gateway due to perpetual labour disputes at our ports. Once again a protracted labour negotiation is underway between the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) and the International Longshoremen Workers Union (ILWU) Foremen - Local 514, which represents less than 10 per cent of the longshore labour force.

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Member Associations

Alliance of Beverage Licensees - BC

BC Hotel Assn

BC Chamber of Commerce

BC Real Estate Assn

BC Restaurant & Foodservices Assn

BC Trucking Assn

Building Owners & Managers Assn

Building Supply Dealers Assn

Canadian Home Builders Assn – BC

Canadian Restaurant & Foodservices Assn

Independent Contractors & Businesses Assn

Insurance Brokers Assn of BC

New Car Dealers Assn of BC

Retail BC

Retail Council of Canada

Vancouver Board of Trade

Western Silvicultural Contractors Assn

The Coalition of BC Businesses was formed in 1992 to represent the voice of small and medium-sized businesses in the development of BC's labour and employment policies. It is made up of organizations that collectively represent over 50,000 small and medium-sized businesses active in all sectors of BC's diverse economy in communities throughout the province. The Coalition supports labour policies that will help foster a positive working relationship between employers and employees and a climate for economic growth and jobs.

The Coalition is asking that you take the necessary steps to end this cycle of uncertain and unreliable labour outcomes at B.C. ports. In this time of significant economic challenge facing Canada and the world, the small businesses of British Columbia cannot afford more labour disruptions at our ports.

Investments in the Asia Pacific Gateway by the federal and provincial governments, along with the private sector, have built a solid base for the expansion of overseas trade. But all those investments, all the trade, and all our overseas customer relations, are at risk of being choked by the labour situation.

We are calling on the Government of Canada to ensure the security and reliability of the Asia Pacific Gateway. The time for action is now. In this tough economic time, we need reliability if we are to be successful. Our ports, just like our businesses, faces significant competition and we need to make sure we are seen as being reliable and effective.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Winter', with a horizontal line underneath.

John Winter
Chair, Coalition of BC Businesses

CC:

The Honourable Rona Ambrose, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Labour

The Honourable John Baird, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Transport and Infrastructure

The Honourable Stockwell Day, P.C., M.P.
Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada