

Chris Delaney: Gordon Campbell's HST is a costly betrayal

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By Chris Delaney

“Nobody really likes Gordon Campbell, and nobody really knows why,” a former British Columbia premier once observed about the current officeholder. With Campbell’s recent announcement of the harmonized sales tax, now we know why.

Having won a third majority after promising no new taxes, the premier slapped struggling British Columbians with this new tax, and in so doing, slapped them in the face just weeks after they trusted him. In an economy that is already fighting for its life, the damage of this tax—to tourism, the restaurant industry, housing, construction, manufacturing, forestry, consumers, families, charities, and renters—will be devastating.

We are told this tax will make B.C. more competitive. Competitive with whom? Newfoundland and Labrador? New Brunswick? Nova Scotia? The three poorest provinces in Canada which already have the HST? When has increasing taxes ever made an economy more productive or competitive?

If you answered “never”, move to the front of the line.

And just what are the federal Conservatives doing proposing an HST for B.C. anyway? Didn’t they promise to eventually eliminate the GST? If so, then why propose a way to collect sales taxes on behalf of the provinces? Or is the HST their tacit admission that we are stuck with the GST forever?

To get us to “buy in”, the feds are offering B.C. a \$1.5-billion “free” gift. When was the last time a federal government gave a province anything for free? With the HST, the feds have simply found yet another way to rape the B.C. treasury. Try to imagine what the remittance calculations will look like once federal accountants determine what our “portion” of that tax will be. Better still, try to imagine what will happen if there are any ongoing disputes between B.C. and Ottawa that could temporarily “delay” B.C.’s cheque when it comes due.

The Liberals say this will help business by allowing them to receive “credits” for PST the same as with GST. But can’t that be done without combining the two taxes, and without applying PST to everything the GST applies to?

If you answered “yes”, move to the front of the line again.

The HST has only one purpose—to increase taxes by applying PST to goods and services that were previously exempt. It is a naked tax grab for both the federal Conservatives and the

B.C. Liberals. Governments that really want to stimulate business and consumer growth look for ways to cut or eliminate taxes, not create new ones.

Ask yourself, do you want B.C.'s economy to be more like Alberta's with no PST, or more like Nova Scotia's with an HST?

This latest Campbell government betrayal is just one more in a long line: the sale of B.C. Rail and the resulting influence-peddling charges by the RCMP, the Recognition Act, the carbon tax, cap and trade, shady lobbyists, the **Doug Walls** affair, German-built ferries, Olympic boondoggles, the convention centre, the RAV Line, the carving up of B.C. Hydro, the destruction of e-mail evidence in the B.C. Rail criminal trial, and now the HST.

So what is the solution?

If you answered "the NDP", move to the back of the line.

It took the NDP eight days to come out in opposition to the HST. And that's not because **Carole James** forgot her cellphone while on vacation. We all know that socialists love new taxes like the HST. And as much as I hate this tax, I would have even paid the extra seven percent to be a front-row fly on the wall during James's caucus meeting on it: "What a great idea!" "Think of all the money we could spend!" "Why didn't we think of that?!" Then Carole chimes in: "But wait, the people hate it." The room groans: "Aaaaaawwww." Carole: "I know! How about we oppose it, for now?" Wink. Wink.

The HST is proof positive that the B.C. Liberals and the NDP are two sides of the same coin of "big government". The NDP is big government on behalf of big labour, and the Liberals are big government on behalf of big corporations—and in both cases, you pick up the tab.

We need labour, we need corporations, and we need small businesses and jobs, but we also need a government that acts on behalf of the general interest. A government that knows its proper role is as a referee between competing interests, not an advocate for one over the other.

B.C. Conservatives want to conserve what is best about B.C., but make government smaller. Not so you fall through the cracks, but so you can get ahead and grow and prosper. The B.C. Liberals' wasteful, profligate, and counterproductive spending and increased tax burden to pay for it all are signs of a failing, dictatorial government that is totally out of control.

It's time for it to stop. Government is no longer the solution; it has become the problem. The HST is all the evidence we need of that.

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