

The Daily News

Premier says ports need to work together

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B.C.'s ports need to work together using an "integrated response" to compete with U.S. ports going after Canadian business, said B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell on Friday.

Campbell was responding to a question about his support of a recent B.C. Progress Board report on transportation that recommends the amalgamation of Prince Rupert port authority with those in the Lower Mainland.

While Campbell wouldn't go as far as recommending amalgamation, he did stress the importance of co-operation between Rupert and Lower Mainland ports.

"We have no time in British Columbia for our ports to be competing with one another," said Campbell.

Rather he said it's time for B.C. ports to "reach out and succeed in competing against the ports in Long Beach, the ports in Seattle-Tacoma, the ports going after our Canadian business.

"We have to think of an integrated response, we have to think of what our strengths are."

He said there are strengths in the port of Prince Rupert and those strengths have to be taken advantage of. In addition, he said there's a capacity problem on the South Coast and the province would like to take some of those strains off the South Coast.

"I can tell you, there's enough opportunity, there's enough economic growth and there's enough demand."

"Frankly I don't want our ports fighting one another, I want our ports fighting the competition which is south of the border and up and down the coast," said the Premier.

And we can do that."

He said the province won't be playing favorites with its ports.

"British Columbia is going to work on behalf of all of our ports," he said. "We are going to make sure all of them are securing their future they way they should."

Campbell met with the Prime Minister among others federal politicians last December. At that time, he said they spoke about what the feds can do to provide opportunities at both ports.

"I know this -- Canada will lose if we don't maximize the benefits from all the ports," he said.

The Premier also affirmed his support for community airports.

The Progress Board report also recommended regionalizing passenger service from Rupert and Smithers in Terrace.

"We, as a government, have been very clear what our goals are for regional airports," he said. "We think they are a critical part of social infrastructure, economic infrastructure, and we've put resources aside to help expand these airports.

"The short answer on the idea of one centralized airport is that we would not be in favour of that," he said. "It's what I call 'an eight and a half by eleven' answer as opposed to a 'what happens on the ground' kind of answer."

All that being said, the Premier added the B.C. Progress Board operates at arms length from the government and is there to explore new ideas.

"The Progress Board is independent and we encourage them to put new ideas into the public place," he said.