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## Michael Ignatieff addresses the BCTD Legislative Conference...here is his pitch

### "15 minutes with Iggy"

Thank you very much. I am going to have to shorten my introduction in future. I am especially pleased to be here today and especially pleased to bring you greetings on behalf of the Liberal Party. We are a party that understands and what you do and why it matters. You build the country – there are very few people that can say that. **You build the country and we value what you do enormously. I want to add a personal element – it happens my son is training to be apprentice plumber and as my wife says it's about time someone in our family knew how to do something.** By the time he finishes with someone in this audience he will be a qualified tradesman and it would give me honour as a father and enormous pride to have a son who is mastered the difficult complex trades that you practice, the trades on which the lives of which Canadians depend. As I have watched my son go through this training I see how tough it is – he really has had to sweat and struggle – that is the way it should be...we don't want the pipes to leak and people to be left in the lurch. That's your job and as I have watched him work with you I have gained enormous respect for what you do.

I want to talk about the Liberal vision of what a federal government is for and pick a few of the specific issues outlined in the very, very fine legislative agenda you prepared and sent to me in advance of my

speaking. I want to compliment your organization for the seriousness and detail of the legislative booklet. For hardworking MPS it was very, very helpful document. It is a model of how an organization lobbies Ottawa and MPs and I thank you for all your efforts.

My sense of the key question in federal politics is... **what is the government for?** Every party has to have an answer to that question. Our answer is 3 purposes that are central to our work as parliamentarians and potentially as the next Government of Canada. **The eternal jobs of Canadian politicians is to maintain unity, to make sure no region is pitted against another, to break down the barriers that divide Canadians and to bring Canadians together.** The third goal is to maintain equality of all Canadians – sense that we all have equal rights and responsibilities. We all put our trousers on one leg at a time – we all face the law and its consequences as equals...that sense of equality in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a great thing in our country but is a struggle to maintain. Those three things – unity, breaking down barriers and maintaining our equality amongst Canadians seems to be what I'm in the business of politics to do and why my colleagues are in the business they are in.

Let me take a look at each of the issues you have brought up in your legislative

book and give you my reaction to some of the points. One of your points in the legislative booklet which affects national unity is **Bill-C22. C-22 affects national unity and is terribly important for Canada.** Everybody believes that it is natural as populations grow in provinces we should adjust representation accordingly. We know that population is growing strongly – we strongly support increased representation for British Columbia and Alberta but not at the expense of Ontario. And that's what C-22 seems to promote. **We oppose it and you oppose it.** This is important because it is about national unity and fairness to national unity. You can't build fairness on running against the province of Ontario – let me get raw partisan for a moment. This is a Conservative government with a beef against Ontario – we can't understand it. We can't understand why it is good for Ontario to tell foreign investors not to bother doing business with Ontario. What is that all about?? That is unworthy and divisive. That is not leadership. It is not profitable for business or helpful for the national unity of our country.



Second area I wanted to discuss today is a little more detailed and that is breaking down the barriers which separate Canadians. Many of you are aware we don't really have a single market of labour across the country. We have substantial barriers which impede the capacity to go from one province to the other. **With unemployment concentrating strongly in certain regions and skills shortages in another it is very important we work together to knock down the barriers which make it diff for labour to move from one place to another. One of the things which your group has proposed which we will address when we get back into government is to take a look at the income tax act and get the expenses for travel deduction against incomes allowed for tradespeople.** If we want to get - I'm a politician so I'm trying to stroke the beast in the direction of its fur - but what I see is a national unity thing here. What I see is something we could do that reduces barriers - allows us to have a labour market if you cant get work in Newfoundland or New Brunswick or northern Ontario you want to stay there (lets be clear) but you want to work in Manitoba or northern Alberta you are going to incur expense and it makes sense to do whatever we can to allow you to deduct those expenses for income. **I'm in opposition but I'm listening loud and clear...it makes good sense to me - it achieves a core purpose of government. Loud and clear!** I will work for this in Caucus.

Another area where I think it is important is maintaining equality for all Canadians. My sense of equality is that a government has to step up and help people get the skills that are possessed in this room. Because of my son I am very aware of this - **we need to get people help with getting into apprenticeships...I noticed from your stats that there are increasing registrations but the number of people graduating are flat. Did I get that right? I am aware of it now and am grateful for you bringing it to my attention. The immediate thing we should do is extend the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant to give people a leg up so that they can complete.** In my own son's experience - I'm keeping him going financially while he stopped working for training -

I can do that as they pay me pretty well here in Ottawa as an MP. I'm not supposed to say that but it makes me realize it is very tough for many Canadians to come out of the labour force get into apprenticeship training. The fed government ought to be there - to bring those two curves together .... the graphs need to match. That would be a good piece of public policy - we can work on that together and would make us a more efficient economy. It serves a key moral and political goal which is to enhance the opportunities for Canadians, so we are all on a equal playing field.

The other area where your proposals are relevant and important - I sat in on the previous discussion when you were talking about the EI account. Today politicians heard and I heard the anger about Employment Insurance - the anger about contributions poured into a system and then used to pay down a federal deficit. I hear the anger. Now the government has come forward with this new Crown Corporation the CEIFB. **Mike Savage, MP from Dartmouth and Judy Sgro M.P York West - the members of this committee are looking hard at the questions - we are looking hard at the long list of serious questions you gave us to ask - they seem to be entirely the right questions .** We are looking at an economy that is going into a recession - no one wants to talk down the Economy but the climate is difficult and tight. In Quebec it is tough in the manufacturing sector and the pulp and paper industries. It is very tough for all Canadians and in this context of an darkening economic climate as they bring in a new EI Crown Corp with a \$2 billion fund the question you are asking and we are asking is that ENOUGH? Just this morning in committee we discussed how actuaries are indicating a fund in the 10BB range would be necessary. This will ensure benefits if unemployment begins to surge in sectors or regions. It is paramount we act now to have a system fro the unemployed and workers for the bad times that are coming in 2008 and 2009 and the questions we have to ask - is that 2Billin enough to deal with the rainy day. We are worried you are worried and this is an area where we want to work on.

**The other area you raised was that EI has an important function in funding training. If you go on EI you get some of your training paid for. It is important this Crown Corporation maintains this training purpose.** We need to get workers to the next level and we can't do it without EI. In those two areas we don't have a problem in principal but **WE DON'T WANT THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT, INTRODUCING A CROWN CORPORATION and PUTTING A CAP ON EI BY STEALTH.** THAT'S WHY THIS ISSUE IS IMPORTANT. We need to listen to the people who understand the system and make sure Canada cares for Canadians and remains compassionate. That's point number 1 - point number 2 is we need to make sure EI is continuing a leading role to help young Canadians get a trade, get an apprenticeship and complete the training,

Those are some issues in relation to national unity - C22, tax deductions for travel and accommodations for tradespeople and the EI issue where I hope you are hearing a politician who is listening to you. This politician respects the work that you did to prepare for this conference and thought about what you said, **picked out the issues where I feel there is the most possibility of common action.**

The thing I would like to conclude with - yes we are in opposition and today in QP I said "you people (the conservatives) have been power for 2.5 hrs" let me tell you - it feels like a lifetime and its only been 2.5 years. The thing you have to understand about the Liberal party - some of you vote for other parties and I respect that - we are the party with the largest and most enduring political base. About a third of this country will vote for us if we give them a good reason. We plan to do at least that and you are looking at someone who fully expects to be in government - other parties up here today will be in opposition forever. **We will be the government and it is terribly important (whether you like us or you don't) that you understand the Liberal Party is here to listen -** this is the moment where we have time to listen because we are not in government. This is why coming here today is so important to me. Cont...3

Thank you for the invitation to speak and thank you for the excellent legislative agenda you presented to us – it gave me a lot to think about and respond to.

I hope we will be partnership with you – we will be in government and hopefully we can work together.

Thank you.

