CEO Message

On September 22, a provincial election was called in British Columbia, with Final Voting Day set for October 24, just seven days after B.C.'s general municipal elections on October 17.

Regardless of whether or not you support the timing, that is a lot of campaigning packed into a very short period. For those of us trying to keep candidates, platforms and campaign promises separate, it is beginning to feel a little like voter Sudoku.

Regardless of the party, and regardless of whether candidates are standing for municipal or provincial office, one thing remains constant: we need the people seeking public office to understand the role tourism plays in British Columbia's economy and communities.

In keeping with that message, I decided to use this month's CEO Message a little differently and direct it to the candidates themselves.

Dear Candidate,

Congratulations on putting your name forward for public office. This is a significant commitment, not only of your time and energy, but to the people you are asking to represent, whether that is your community at the municipal level or British Columbians at the provincial level.

As you campaign on the economy, jobs, affordability, infrastructure, investment, public services and the future of our communities, there is a very good reason to keep a tourism lens in mind: tourism touches almost every one of those promises.

We want to make sure tourism is top-of-mind and part of those conversations while you are campaigning and, more importantly, if you are elected.

Tourism is big business for B.C. It's one of our largest non-tariffed exports, generating approximately $6 billion each year. Yes, we said non-tariffed. In a campaign where "the hell no to Trump" rhetoric is already part of the political conversation, tourism offers a pretty easy win on the campaign trail.

On the environmental front, the visitor economy is one of B.C.'s largest natural resources. Not only does tourism contribute $8 billion to the provincial GDP each year, which, by the way, is more than the forestry, mining, or oil and gas sectors, but it is also renewable and sustainable. In other words, it is non-extractive and can continue generating economic value year after year.

On top of that, tourism employs more than 163,000 people across BC and generates $23 billion in annual revenues each year. That translates into $2.1 billion in municipal and provincial non-resident tax revenues generated annually. If you're doing the math, those revenues help fund many of the very things you are campaigning about, from health care and infrastructure to public services and tax relief.

This is not a small industry sitting on the sidelines of B.C.'s economy. Tourism is one of BC's economic super powers! Building a stronger B.C. economy requires government to understand how its decisions affect tourism. **Applying a tourism lens** will help the Province make better-informed choices about investment, employment, public revenues and the long-term prosperity of communities throughout British Columbia.

So what are we asking of you?

We are asking you to commit to making tourism part of the conversation from the beginning, while policies and decisions are still being developed, not after they have already been decided. Tourism needs to be considered across government because decisions involving transportation, housing, labour, education, land use, taxation and the environment can all have very real consequences for the visitor economy.

We are asking for greater certainty for business investment, including clearer and more predictable permitting, tenure renewals and provincial approvals. We are also asking government to understand the cumulative impact that new fees, regulations and policies can have, particularly on small businesses and those operating in rural communities.

We are asking you to recognize tourism as a priority in B.C.'s economic planning and to build on the province's ambition of reaching $48 billion in tourism revenue by 2036. That kind of growth will not happen by accident. It will require coordinated decisions across government and a clear plan for how we get there.

We need investment in transportation and visitor infrastructure so people can actually get to the communities we are encouraging them to visit. We need education, labour and workforce policies that help people build lasting and fulfilling careers in tourism. And we need to protect the natural, cultural and community assets that make British Columbia somewhere people want to visit in the first place.

We also need tourism included when governments plan for emergencies, respond to them and support communities through recovery. And we need Indigenous and rural communities to be part of tourism's continued growth, with policies and investment that respect Indigenous rights, reflect local priorities and create opportunities throughout the province.

None of this means tourism should come ahead of every other sector or every other consideration. It means tourism should be **part of the consideration from the beginning.**

That is what we mean when we talk about applying a tourism lens.

So, as you knock on doors, attend debates, speak with voters and make the case for the future you want to see for British Columbia, we have one question for you:

How will the decisions you support recognize tourism's existing role as one of BC's economic super powers and help this crucial sector continue to drive growth, opportunity and prosperity across the province?

We look forward to hearing your answer.

Sincerely,
BC's Tourism Sector