Prime Minister Trudeau and the New Liberal Cabinet:

The New Federal Cabinet

The BC Chamber of Commerce welcomes the recent appointment of the new Liberal cabinet. The Chamber looks forward to working with the Liberal government in Ottawa and those elected officials here in B.C. on the many important issues that need to be addressed in order to grow a strong and prosperous economy in B.C. and across Canada. As we look to further grow our economy, natural resource development will continue to be a key driver for B.C. and other western Canadian provinces.

B.C. will be ground zero for a number of important issues the new Liberal government will have to tackle. While the Liberals have elected a sizeable number of MPs here in B.C. and through the western provinces, the government does have to be mindful that these MPs reside in urban centres for the most part. As the only business association that truly represents the voice of business in every region on the province, this present a unique opportunity for the BC Chamber network to help inform the new B.C. ministers and Liberal B.C. caucus as to the importance of the resource economy to both the provincial and national economy.

The B.C. Context

The Ministers:

Of the 31-member federal cabinet, B.C. received three ministers, all representing Metro Vancouver ridings. The three ministers are:

Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville) – Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

- Minister Wilson-Raybould brings a long list of experience in law, public and First Nations governance to her new role. Her career includes time as a Crown prosecutor, an advisor at the BC Treaty Commission and being elected Regional Chief of the BC Assembly of First Nations. Though she is the Justice Minister, there is little doubt Minister Wilson-Raybould will be an active member of the cabinet on aboriginal issues especially here in B.C.

Harjit Sajjan (Vancouver South) – Minister of National Defence

- Minister Sajjan has served as a soldier, including tours in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan, and a police officer in Vancouver before entering politics. He is the highest ranking Sikh in the Canadian military and the first Sikh to command a Canadian army regiment.

Carla Qualtrough (Delta) – Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities

- Minister Qualtrough is a lawyer, volunteer and Paralympian, who has made equity and inclusion her commitment. She practices human rights law at the both the federal and provincial levels. She herself has been visually impaired since birth.

While these portfolios have little to do with the BC Chamber policy positions, it's worth noting both Ministers Wilson-Raybould and Sajjan are members of the Agenda and Results Committee, formerly Priorities and Planning, which shows the senior position both will play within the Trudeau government.

The Issues:

With depressed commodity prices, and the rejection of projects like Keystone XL, the Canadian economy faces stiff economic headwinds in the months and years ahead. And though B.C. is positioned to lead the country in economic growth, the provincial economy also has to contend with the many challenges that come from low commodity prices be it natural gas or even coal.

B.C. is ground zero in many ways. With the Obama administration's rejection of Keystone, other pipeline projects such as Northern Gateway and the Trans Mountain Expansion Project, become more vital if we want to take advantage of the up to $50 million per day in added government revenue by shifting from being price takers to price makers on the international market.

Many of our resource projects, whether it is pipelines for oil and gas or accessing the many minerals located through the province, are facing stiff opposition from environmental groups or Aboriginal communities. The new federal cabinet is taking over at a critical time that will shape the direction our economy takes for years to come. It is imperative that the Chamber be a lead in making all elected officials aware of the true symbiotic nature between the urban and rural/interior communities throughout B.C. and for that matter across Canada.

From natural resource development to aboriginal relations or climate change initiatives to trade and infrastructure, the BC Chamber and its network is the best positioned to offer helpful insights into the impact these very issues have on our economic well-being for British Columbians and Canadians alike.

Key Ministers to focus on:

Considering the many files that have an impact of B.C. and our economic potential, the list highlights who some of the key ministers are who will be dealing with very issues important to our network in the near term:

Jim Carr (Manitoba) – Minister of Natural Resources

- Minister Carr has been a business and community leader for over 30 years, including time in the Manitoba legislature and as the founding CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba. This portfolio continues to be of great importance to the B.C. economy considering the continuing work of the Northern Gateway to build and Trans Mountain to twin their respective oil pipelines, not to forget the on-going efforts of both the private sector and provincial government to establish a new LNG export industry.

Catherine McKenna (Ontario) – Minister of Environment and Climate Change

- Minister McKenna is an Executive Director of a non-profit group that engages emerging Canadian leaders in public policy discussion. Considering the economic significance of our natural resource wealth to the overall economic strengthen of both the B.C. and Canadian economy, the efforts of the new Minister in tackling the climate change file will have a significant impact of B.C., especially as it might impact what the B.C. government has enacted to date to counter GHG emissions.

Carolyn Bennett (Ontario) – Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs

- Minister Bennett is an 18 year veteran Member of Parliament where she served in the Martin government as Minister of State for Public Health and is most recently the critic for Aboriginal Affairs. With the Tsilhqot'in decision still top of mind, Minister Bennett will be trying to balance the government's desire to reset relations with our First Nations while trying to find a way to advance our many resource projects to the benefit of aboriginals and non-aboriginals alike within the government's duty to consult and accommodate.

MaryAnn Mihychuck (Manitoba) – Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour

- Minister Mihychuck is a geoscientist and former member of the provincial NDP government where she served as Minister of Industry, Trade, and Mines and prior to her entry into political life worked in numerous capacities within the mining industry. As the B.C. economy continues to deal with a labour shortage, which will be further exacerbated with the potential for multiple LNG projects coming online, the Temporary Foreign Worker program continues to be an important focus for businesses looking for workers. The BC Chamber network will play a leading role in bringing the new minister up-to-speed on the many impacts this program is having on businesses across B.C. in both the high and low wage categories.

Chrystia Freeland (Ontario) – Minister of International Trade

- Minister Freeland had an extensive career in journalism before being elected to the House of Commons in a 2013 by-election where she has recently served as the critic of International Trade. The Minister finds herself heading a ministry that has two important trade agreements to ratify: the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Both agreements, but especially the TPP from a B.C. perspective, are important to give our businesses better access to two massive economic markets. It will be important for the BC Chamber and its network keep the pressure on the government to ratify these deals.

Amarjeet Sohi (Alberta) – Minster of Infrastructure and Communities

- Minister Sohi, as a two-term Edmonton city councillor, showed a dedication to improving infrastructure and liveability by representing his city on the Canadian Urban Transit Association. In order to be able to increase infrastructure spending, the Liberals said they would run deficits for three more years, so the Minister will be in the hot seat earlier to show these projects are moving ahead in quick order. Considering B.C. is the Gateway to the Asia-Pacific, it is important we continue to advocate for further infrastructure dollars (whether it's our airports, marine ports, road, or rail) that will allow us to take advantage of the new trade corridors with the Asia-Pacific.

John McCallum (Ontario) – Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

- Minister McCallum has been a Member of Parliament since 2004 where he has served in the Martin government as Minister of National Defence, Veterans Affairs and National Revenue.

While the Minister's main focus will be settling 25,000 Syrian refugees by end of December, it is also important to keep the number of important economic immigration issue on the Minister's radar, including Express Entry (for the Skilled Workers, Skilled Trade and Canadian Experience programs) and Working Holiday Visa program.

Bardish Chagger (Ontario) – Minister of Small Business and Tourism

- Minister Chagger is a former executive assistant to a former Member of Parliament for Waterloo, which gives her a good understanding of the issues related to manufacturing, technology and innovation. Though her role is new and not really defined at this point, small business and tourism are key issues for the BC Chamber network. It will be important to follow-up with the Minister as she familiarizes herself with the new portfolio so that she know the impact tourism (especially the need to better leverage our marketing to attract international visitors) and small business (such as regulatory reduction) has on the economic success of our province.