Premier tasks Santa Ono to establish innovation network

VANCOUVER – Premier Christy Clark today named UBC president Professor Santa Ono as her Chief Advisor of the Innovation Network designed to foster greater collaboration between public post-secondary institutions and innovation-driven industries.

The creation of an Innovation Network will link post-secondary institutions to industry – helping to ensure graduates have the skills that industry and employers need from life science to digital media through to clean energy – so British Columbians are first in line for career opportunities. The Network will give industry access to leading edge researchers inside post-secondary institutions to help solve problems in the industry. The Network will also support the attraction of business and talent to the province, while ensuring that the Network in British Columbia can compete on the global stage.

“A diverse range of innovation-related industries in our province continues to outperform the general economy, and employs more than 100,000 people,” said Premier Clark. “Professor Ono is an internationally respected leader who will ensure through this collaborative effort, that homegrown talent and industry needs are aligned, while helping to spur industry innovation and continued growth of our economy.”

The Chief Advisor, working with the Premier’s Technology Council, will convene industry, post-secondary leaders and research agencies from throughout the province to build relationships, make linkages and provide a forum to support innovation in the provincial economy.

“Talent is what drives innovation. and having access to the right talent is critical to the ongoing growth of our diverse tech sector in British Columbia,” said Professor Ono. “B.C.’s colleges, institutes and universities are producing the best and brightest minds to fuel the innovation economy and have the research capacity to find solutions to the business, technical and growth challenges that the sector faces. Economies that invest and develop next generation solutions and talent will be those who grow and profit.”

In March 2017, Professor Ono will convene stakeholders in the innovation network at a forum during the #BCTECH Summit. The forum will identify current successes in talent development, cluster strengths and opportunities, and research-to-innovation models. The forum will identify focus and serve as the launch for further consultations and analysis with findings presented at #BCTECH 2018.

Over the course of the next year, Professor Ono will focus on talent, research and innovation, and super-clusters. This includes:

- Development and implementation of strategies to attract and retain talent.
• Alignment of tech sector needs and post-secondary training and education.
• Identify programs and corresponding investments to meet industry demand.
• Work with industry, post-secondary institutions and research agencies to encourage research that meets industry needs and supports innovation.
• Undertake a gap analysis to ensure innovation clusters are best positioned to compete globally.

“An innovation-network will benefit industries throughout the province with greater co-ordination and alignment in meeting the ever-evolving needs of a diverse group of knowledge-based employers,” said Don Mattrick, co-chair of the Premier’s Technology Council. “The knock-on effect of greater collaboration between post-secondary sector and employer is the advancement of local and provincial economies.”

“Talent remains a critical priority for the tech sector and we are pleased to see that the post-secondary sector is actively engaged in finding solutions,” said Derek Lew, board chair of the BC Innovation Council. “The appointment of Professor Ono will further strengthen innovation in B.C.’s tech sector.”

The B.C. technology sector currently supports more than 100,000 jobs, houses more than 9,900 technology companies, and B.C. tech sector jobs pay 75% higher wages than the average.

According to the British Columbia 2025 Labour Market Outlook, careers in the information technology field are ranked among the top opportunity occupations throughout the province. For example, information systems analysts and consultants are expecting approximately 9,100 job openings while computer programmers and interactive media developers are expecting 7,800 openings by 2025. The province is also expecting 3,800 openings for computer network technicians.

In partnership with the BC Innovation Council, the Province is hosting B.C.’s second #BCTECH Summit, March 14-15, 2017, with made-in-B.C. tech innovations, thought-provoking keynotes and outstanding networking opportunities. To register or learn more, go to: http://bctechsummit.ca

A backgrounder follows.

Media Contacts:
Stephen Smart
Press Secretary
Office of the Premier
Stephen.Smart@gov.bc.ca
778 389-6202

Rodney Porter
Ministry of Advanced Education
rodney.porter@gov.bc.ca
250 952-6508

Susan Danard, UBC Public Affairs
susan.danard@ubc.ca
604 312-0845

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: www.gov.bc.ca/connect
Opportunity:

British Columbia has one of Canada’s most vibrant innovation ecosystems, with the B.C. tech sector growing rapidly and B.C.-grown talent in high demand in Canada and around the world.

But we aspire to do more.

We want to ensure that we are retaining and attracting the innovation talent we need today and for the economy of the future.

We want our post-secondary institutions to provide graduates with an education that includes the skills needed to grow B.C.’s innovation economy.

We want to ensure that our public research institutions are accessible to B.C. companies and partner with them to develop innovative solutions and technologies.

We want B.C. to be the go-to market for partners in the United States, Asia and beyond.

We want to ensure that B.C.’s key innovation clusters are recognized, and attracting investment to British Columbia.

And, we want to leverage our unique place in the world, as North America’s Asia-Pacific Gateway and the Canadian hub in the Cascadia Corridor.

To do this, we want to transform the B.C. innovation ecosystem into an innovation network— a network that is collaborative, coordinated and supported, and can compete with innovation centres around the world.

Structure:

- The Premier has appointed Santa J. Ono as the province’s first Chief Advisor: Innovation Network. He will report directly to the Premier.
- Prof. Ono will join the Premier’s Technology Council as a member.
- To undertake this role, Prof. Ono will work closely with the Premier’s Technology Council, the BC Innovation Council, the BCTech Association, LifeSciences BC, DigiBC and the Clean Tech CEOs Alliance and also with partners across B.C.’s innovation network, such as innovation-driven companies spanning economic sectors, research agencies, industry and business associations, and post-secondary institutions and associations.
Mandate:

Prof. Ono will work with partners throughout the province to establish B.C.’s Innovation Network. He will:

- Recommend strategies that will attract talent to support the continued growth of the tech sector.
- Work with B.C. post-secondary sector partners to collaborate with industry on talent development and research.
- Identify promising policy and program changes to spur further innovation, including policy, business incentives, government procurement and immigration.
- Promote B.C.’s key innovation clusters to ensure they are recognized in B.C., Canada and around the world.

Link to all regions of the province to ensure that all British Columbians are able to participate in the promise of the innovation economy.

Deliverables:

Later this year, Prof. Ono will convene key stakeholders in B.C’s innovation network at a forum in conjunction with the #BCTECH Summit.

- The forum will identify current successes in talent development, cluster strengths and opportunities, and research-to-innovation models. Importantly, the forum will serve as the launch for further consultations and sector analysis.
- The Premier will be updated on an ongoing basis and findings will be presented at #BCTECH 2018.

Particular focus through the course of the year will include:

- **Talent:**
  - Develop and implement strategies to attract talent.
  - Ensure alignment of tech sector needs and post-secondary training and education.
  - Promote successful entrepreneurship programs.
  - Develop best practice for immersive, experiential learning.
- **Research & Innovation:**
  - Identify programs and corresponding investments to meet industry demand.
  - Work with industry, post-secondary institutions and research agencies to encourage research that meets industry needs and supports innovation and a smooth transition to commercialization and export markets.
  - Assess B.C.’s innovation pipeline, with specific focus on incubation and acceleration supports and the resources required to scale successful BC based companies.
- **Superclusters:**
  - Undertake a gap analysis to ensure innovation clusters are best positioned to compete globally.
  - Identify opportunities for partnership and collaboration.
  - Identify focused investment opportunities to promote innovation clusters.

It is anticipated that Prof. Ono’s efforts to bring together stakeholders across B.C.’s innovation network will spur new and productive collaborative partnerships between industry and post-
secondary institutions, such as on curriculum design, work integrated learning, and joint research.

Throughout the course of his work, Prof. Ono will pay particular attention to promoting the success of Indigenous youth, B.C.’s connections with the Asia Pacific and the burgeoning Cascadia Corridor.

**Media Contacts:**

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Stephen.Smart@gov.bc.ca  
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