

Taxpayers reluctant skeleton in 2010 bid

When Jack Poole addressed a room full of real estate developers this spring it erased any doubts of what the **2010 Winter Olympics** bid for Vancouver-Whistler is really all about.

At the risk of sounding naïve, we had understood the bid was aimed at getting the games, raising Vancouver's international profile and welcoming elite athletes to one of the world's best skiing locations.

Wrong. The real purpose of the 2010 Olympics bid is to seduce the provincial and federal governments and long-suffering taxpayers into footing a billion-dollar bill to pave the path for future real estate sales. Whether the bid is successful or not is actually immaterial.

Typical B.C. taxpayers could be compared to a reluctant skeleton competitor: strapped in and dropped down a chute without any idea of what they are going to hit.

"If the Olympic bid wasn't happening we would have to invent something," Poole, chair of the **2010 Vancouver Bid**

Corp. and a noted real estate developer, said in a most telling understatement.

It is hard to imagine any fantasy that fits better than the Olympics bid if you are into real estate development.

Governments have to make big-time financial commitments right away if they are going to wow the **International Olympic Committee** members who will be in Vancouver next February to see if we are up to snuff.

The forum delegates were told that the

following agreements have to be made within months: a billion-dollar expansion of the Sea-to-Sky highway to a three-lane freeway; a SkyTrain link from **Vancouver Int'l Airport** to downtown Vancouver; and a new convention centre on the Vancouver waterfront next to the **Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre**. And this is before we start building state-of-art sports facilities.

B.C. taxpayers, of course, will pay for all of this, even the vast majority who will not be able to afford to attend the games, let alone book into a fancy Whistler hotel.

The Olympic bid committee expects

all these commitments to be in place by this fall with work actually under way very early in 2003. We have no doubt they will be. But we have doubts they should be.

We're not whining about how B.C. needs other things — such as homes for seniors, schools for children or hospitals for sick people — more than it needs the Olympics. We are just suggesting that those who will really benefit from the Olympics infrastructure should be paying a bigger share of it.

For instance, who do you think will gain the most from a freeway from Vancouver to Whistler? If you guessed developers who are already buying land in the corridor, you are right. Who will reap the rewards from a \$450 million convention centre? Hint: it's not the laid-off sawmill worker in Prince George whose taxes will help foot the bill.

Right now, the official line is that Berne, Switzerland, has the best chance of winning the 2010 Olympics, with Vancouver in second by a nose. The fear is B.C.'s taxpayers will be strapped in for the ride before the decision is ever made.

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