We have an office in Beijing?

Province of B.C. & Ben Stewart spend $3m/year

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Data and Information in this report have been collected by Andrew Johns through internet research and are considered reliable. Opinions are his and are meant to provide the public and community with a transparent understanding.

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Summary

In October of 2013, Ben Stewart was appointed as *British Columbia Special Representative for Asia ("BCSRA")*[1]. This special appointment was the first of its kind for British Columbia's Government.

Considering Mr. Stewart's lack of experience of doing business in Asia, this appointment certainly raises notable concerns that are worth exploring. A closer look at key events prior to his appointment suggests a carefully orchestrated political maneuver occurred between Stewart and the current Premier, Christy Clark.

This report will explore the cost to B.C. taxpayers for placing Mr. Stewart in this role and the ongoing expense of maintaining staffed offices China. We also explore whether there has been any economic benefit of creating the BCSRA position, based on documents obtained through the *Open Information Catalogue* and *Freedom of Information Act*.

Table of Contents

Background & Timeline……..Page 1

What Are The Costs?.....Page 2

Accomplishments Over 3 Years in China……Page 7

Recommendations……..Page 9

References……Page 10

Background & Timeline

The following timeline highlights key events leading up to Ben Stewart's appointment as the B.C. Special Representative in Asia. Prior to Stewart's role as MLA in 2009, he played an active role in Kelowna's business community. He successfully incorporated his family's winery, *Quails' Gate Estate Winery* and in 2006 was awarded the *President's Award* by the local Chamber of Commerce for promoting tourism in the Okanagan[2].

- May 2009 – *Provincial Election*
  - Stewart wins the Westside-Kelowna Electoral District, with 53% of the overall votes. Voter turnout for this riding was 47%[3].
  - Campaign financing outflows were as follows:
    Ben Stewart (LIB): $95,419[4] | Peter Neville (CPC): $9,705[5] | Tish Lakes (NDP): $24,122[6]
- June 2009
  - Premier Gordon Campbell promotes Stewart to Citizens' Services and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism and the Public Affairs Bureau[7].
- June 2010
  - Stewart appointed to Minister of Community and Rural Development[8].
- October 2010
  - Stewart appointed to Minister of Agriculture[9].
- March 2011
  - Stewart appointed by Christy Clark as government whip[10].
- September 2012
  - Stewart appointed as Minister of Citizens' Services and Open Government[11].
- May 2013 – *Provincial Election*
  - Stewart (incumbent) once again wins the riding for Westside-Kelowna with 58% of overall votes. Voter turnout was 50%[12].
  - Campaign financing outflows were as follows:
    Ben Stewart (LIB): $74,230[13] | Brian Guillou (CPC): $4,295[14] | Carole Gordon (NDP): $38,827[15]
- June 2013
  - Stewart steps down as MLA[16].
- July 2013 – *By-election*
  - Christy Clark wins the Westside-Kelowna Electoral District, with 63% of the overall votes. Voter turnout was 41[17]%.
  - Campaign Financing – Total Outflows:
    Christy Clark (LIB): $56,758[18] | Sean Upshaw: $9,755 (CPC)[19] | Carole Gordon (NDP): $38,827[20]
  - Elections B.C. spends $482,228 to administer[21].
- October 2013
  - Stewart appointed as "British Columbia Special Representative in Asia"[22]
- December 2016
  - Stewart resigns as "British Columbia Special Representative in Asia"[23]

Costs

As the British Columbia Special Representative in Asia, Ben Stewart's mandate and responsibilities were determined and co-written by himself and Minister Wat. This excerpt[24] from the *Office of the Premier* provides the following details:

- *Act as the official Province of British Columbia on-the-ground representative in Asia.*
- *Report to the Minister of International Trade and the Premier, and advise Ministers, businesses and local governments on a strategic approach to advance the province's trade and investment priorities in Asia.*
- *Establish monthly meetings with Managing Directors of BC's Trade and Investment Offices in Asia and B.C.-based country Directors of Ministry of International Trade to advance key strategic trade and investment files.*
- *Foster and strengthen government-to-government relationships key to B.C. companies successfully doing business in Asia.*
- *Leverage and maximize key strategic opportunities identified and developed as a result of trade and investment missions of the Premier and Ministers.*
- *Initiate and/or build strategic relationships with key companies and executives interested in developing, investing in or exporting B.C.'s natural gas opportunities.*
- *Lead the development and implementation of strategies to identify and attract key Asian companies to establish their North American head offices in B.C.*
- *Represent and promote the Province of British Columbia in meetings with other governments, businesses and stakeholders, including acting as host where appropriate.*
- *Represent and promote the Province of British Columbia at events and activities to advance the Asia Pacific Trade and Investment Strategy and government trade priorities.*
- *Lead the negotiation and/or development of partnerships, protocols, Memorandums of Understanding and/or agreements with other governments, agencies and institutions, including acting as official Signatory for the Province of British Columbia where required.*

Labour Costs – Ben Stewart

Costs associated with Mr. Stewart's full-time employment as BCSRA were as follows:

Annual Compensation & Allowances (CAD):

Base salary :	$150,000[25]
8% bonus in lieu of pension:	$12,000[26]
Living expenses:	$90,000[27]
Personal travel expenses:	$15,000[28]
Local travel budget in Beijing:	$36,000[29]
Language lessons:	$2,400[30]
Chargeback:	$37,500[31]
Annual total cost:	***$342,900***

On top of the annual compensation and allowances, Ben Stewart was also entitled 5 weeks of vacation days annually and an extensive health and welfare benefit through Pacific Blue Cross.

Total cost (2014 – 2016): $1,028,700

Rental costs

In taking on his new role, Ben Stewart relocated the Province of B.C.'s Beijing office to the prestigious Beijing Kerry Centre[32].

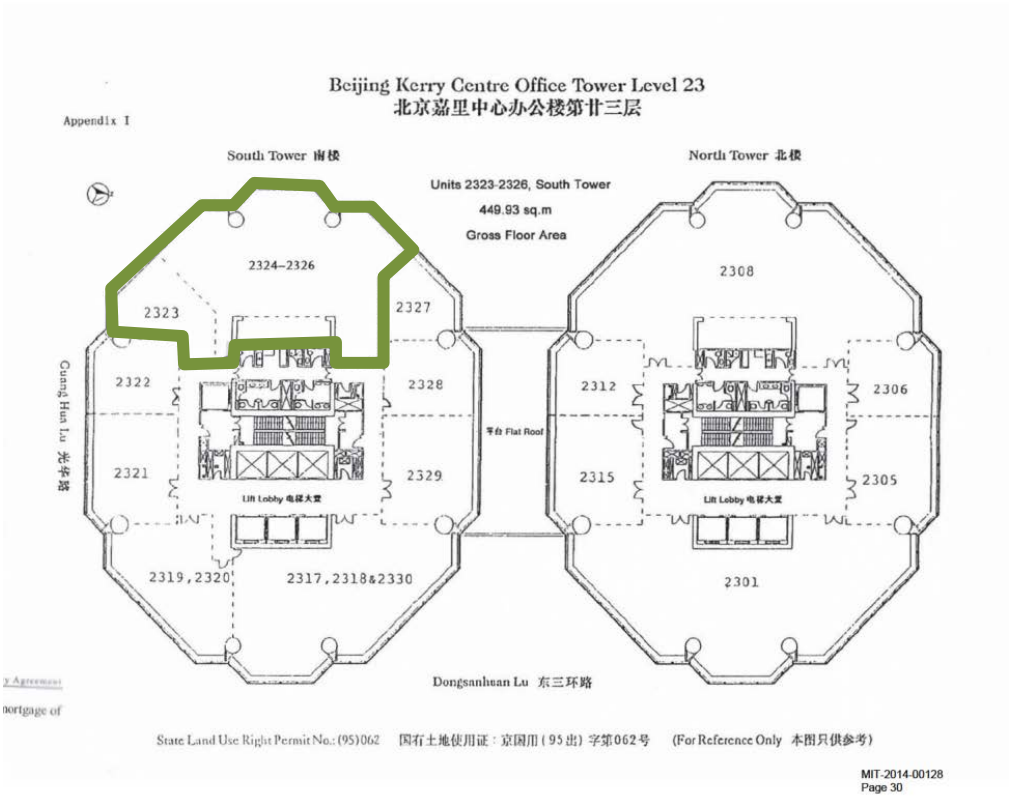
The monthly cost of office rent is ¥370 sq.m^2 ($6.57 sq.ft^2). Given the size of the office is 449.93 sq.m^2 (4,843 sq.ft^2) the monthly rent is ¥166,474 ($31,830).[33] Adjusted to Canadian Dollars, this translates to:

Leasing Costs - Beijing Office (CAD)

Office rent sq.ft^2 per month:	*$6.57*	
Total monthly cost:	*$31,830*	*Accounting for exchange rate fluctuation, the actual cost in Canadian dollars is $1,153,156 over the course of the years 2014 – 2016.*
Total annual cost of office rent :	***$381,960***	
Total cost of office rent for the period (2014 – 2016):	***$1,145,880***	

Note: Foreign Exchange of 1 CNY = $0.1912 CAD

The rental space for the Beijing office is highlighted below and includes areas in the South Tower, in units 2323-2326.



The rental agreement below shows the Ministry of International Trade occupying Suites 2323-2326 on a fixed lease from April 15, 2014 to March 31, 2017. With only eight staff, each employee was allocated an average of 605 sq.ft^2 of Class 'A' office space.

THE SCHEDULE

PART 1 PARTICULARS OF PARTIES

Landlord: BEIJING JIA AO REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT CO., LTD.
Address: No.1 Guang Hua Road, Chao Yang District, Beijing 100020, the People's Republic of China

Tenant: International Business Development Division Ministry of International Trade Government of British Columbia
Address: Asia Pacific Business Centre
Suite 288 – 800 Hornby Street
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2C5
Representative: Henry Han, Executive Director, China

PART 2 PARTICULARS OF PREMISES

Level(s)	:	23, South Office Tower
Unit(s)	:	2323-2326
Gross Floor Area ("GFA")	:	Approximately 449.93sq.m.

(Including the usable space of the Premises and a pro-rata share of the mechanical and electrical installation areas and common facilities for the day to day operation of the Building.)

PART 3 PARTICULARS OF TERM

Term	:	Two (2) years eleven (11) months and seventeen (17) days
Commencement Date	:	15th April, 2014
Expiry Date	:	31st March, 2017

(Inclusive of the Commencement Date and Expiry Date)

Support Staff 2014-2016

Ben Stewart was also supported by eight *Investment Representatives* contracted from *Ho Hing Consultancy Inc.* The annual cost of contracted staff and office rent is as follows:

Under the contract with Ho Hing Consultancy, the Ministry is obliged to pay *¥10,837,145 (approx. $2,072,062)* [34] for the company's office services:

2. FEES:

Rate per Unit/Deliverable

Fees: as per the Table:

Note: Foreign Exchange of 1 CNY = $0.1912 CAD

Annual Contract Values	Totals in **RMB**
Executive Director Salary	s17
Staff/Subcontractor Salary	
Beijing - Administration/Program Cost Total	1,986,875
Shanghai - Administration/Program Cost Total	1,452,000
FC15563241 Contract TOTAL	**10,837,145 RMB**

Note: The budget table includes funds available to the contractor for all expenses for any associated staff (subcontractors) including, but not limited to, compensation, social benefit payments as mandated by local law, and any other benefits or perquisites offered by the Contractor to the sub-contractors. These amounts also include a potential annual performance bonus payment.

Note: Quarterly Advance at month 1, 4, 7, 10 for Staff/Subcontractor Salary and Administration/Programs.

Annual Cost: $2,072,062

Total Cost (2014 – 2016): $6,216,186

The estimation above is supported by the disclosure through the Province of BC Public Accounts[35]. We have verified that $2,316,985 was paid to Ho Hing Consultancy Inc. for the fiscal year 2015/16.

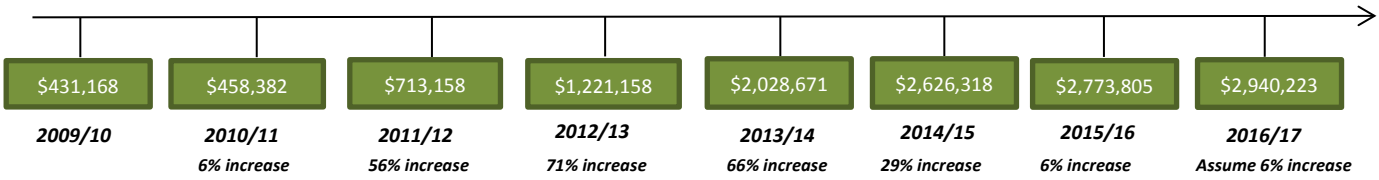
PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS 2015/16 339

Other Suppliers – Continued

	$		$
HLR SERVICES LTD.	125,122	HUSKY OIL MARKETING COMPANY	101,991
HO HING CONSULTANCY INC.	2,316,985	HUSKY OIL OPERATIONS LIMITED	750,000
HOBAN CONSTRUCTION LTD.	4,507,618	HUTTON COMMUNICATIONS OF CANADA INC.	28,978
HODGE, FRASER D	140,836	HYATT REGENCY VANCOUVER	46,128

Support Staff 2009-2016

In reviewing the BC Public Accounts going back to 2009, we can also verify payments made to Ho Hing Consultancy Inc. (and annual increases) are as follows:



In the last five years ***Province of B.C. has paid Ho Hing Consultancy Inc. $11.6 million.***

Lost Tax Revenue

Since Ho Hing Consultancy is based out of Beijing, there are very limited means of verifying the tax status of the contracted staff. However, it is safe to assume these seven employees and the consultancy's owner, Kevin Tsui[36], are Chinese nationals and do not pay employment taxes in B.C.

This presents another cost: *Opportunity Cost*. Had the employees been home grown and then assigned to Beijing, the income they earn would be taxable, ergo, generating tax revenues for *both* the provincial and federal government. By employing a foreign entity as the province's trade representatives, there is no guarantee the government would be able to earn viable returns on tax dollars spent abroad. The illustration above shows approximately *$657,512* of the annual payment to Ho Hing Consultancy goes towards covering administrative costs. This translates remaining *$1,414,550* being dispensed for contractors' salaries. Since salary information has been redacted from the by the Ministry, assume that this amount is equally divided amongst the 8 staff as shown below:

This calculation is based on 2016 tax rates and deductions. Payments are based on Semi-monthly payment periods (24 pay periods a year), and assumes the rhetorical employee is a tax resident of B.C.

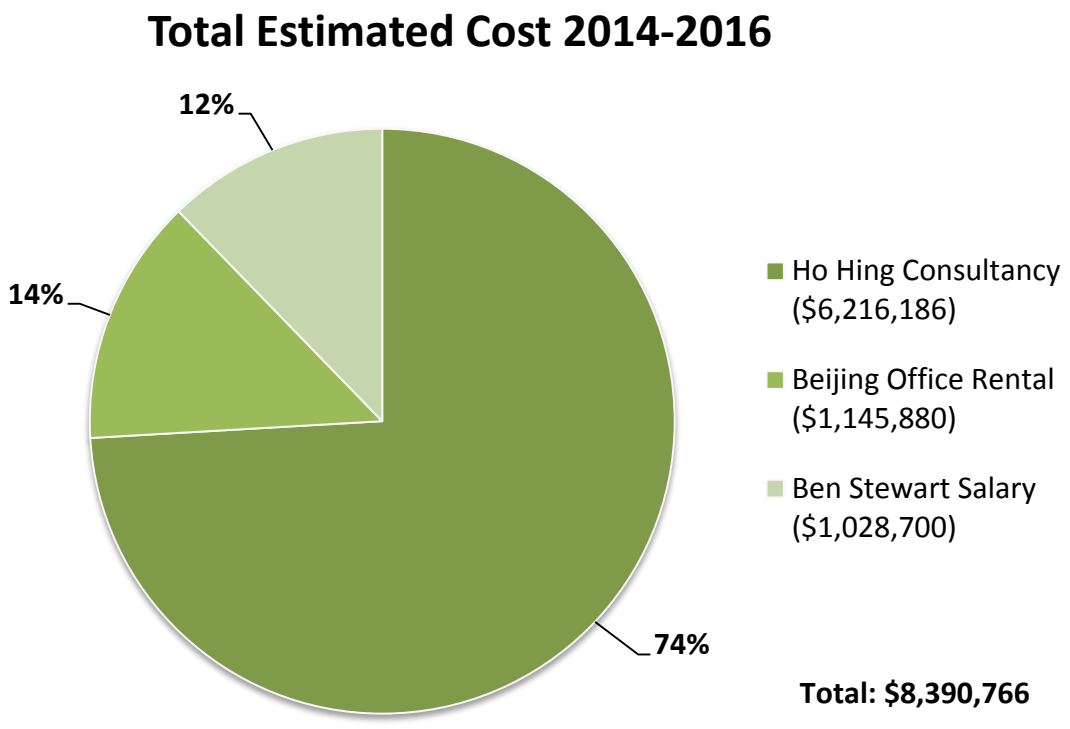
Annual Salary:	**$176,819**
Monthly Salary:	**$14,735**
Federal tax deduction:	$3,096
Provincial tax deduction:	$1,502
CPP deduction:	$715
EI deduction:	$277
Net income after tax & deductions:	**$9,143**
Total monthly tax deductions:	*$4,599*
Total monthly deductions:	*$5,591*
Total provincial tax lost annually per employee:	**$18,024**
Total provincial tax lost annually for all 8 employees:	**$144,192**

Based on this salary estimate and deductions, the B.C. government would have been able to retrieve *$1,502 per person per month* had the employees been B.C. originated. This translates to *$18,024 per employee per annum*. On an annual basis, the province could net approximately ***$144,192*** of tax payers' money from the *$2 Million* spent annually. This translates to ***$432,576*** of missed tax revenue between 2014 and 2016.

The tax calculation demonstrated is only a conservative estimate. In order for us to truly gauge the potential tax lost, we would have to know *precisely* how the *$1,414,550* is allocated annually between the contracted staff.

Observations

Based on this analysis, it is fair to estimate *$8,390,766* as the total cost of having Ben Stewart posted in the new Beijing offices between 2014 and 2016. This is a cost that could have been *at least* $432,576 lower had he been supported by B.C. tax residents (see below). This estimation does not include costs such as flights, accommodation, meals and events hosted by Ben Stewart, Christy Clark, Teresa Wat, Deputy Ministers and associated staff in Asia and British Columbia. We anticipate that that the total cost of maintaining an office in Beijing and other parts of China to be significantly higher than the amount estimated in this report.



Accomplishments

Our assessments of Ben Stewart's performance as BCSRA are mostly based on available documents such as Quarterly Accomplishments and Annual Reports, produced by Mr. Stewart himself.

We noted a significant amount of *"Fact-Finding"* trips throughout the Quarterly Accomplishment Reports. This suggests Ben Stewart's inadequate knowledge in many relevant industries, including those linked to the Trans-Pacific trade between B.C. and Asia. The lack of technical detail in the reports also makes it difficult to fully gauge the BCSRA's quarterly progress. As these reports do not, in any way,

discuss thematic trade challenges between B.C. and Asia, it puts the integrity of the reporting process into question. Given the significance of the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, it is also quite alarming that the question of TPP had not been mentioned brought up in the reports.

Although the Ministry's internal notes pertaining to BCSRA's meetings offer additional details, redacted information further hinders our ability to examine the outcome of each meeting. The biggest obstacle is verifying the commissioner's activities given the lack of reporting documentation being made available to the general public. The annual reports highlight the following accomplishments:

2014 – 2015 (Per Annual Report)

- Attracted approximately $3 billion in new investment[37]
- 125 meetings with government officials and corporate executives
- Participated in over 20 events
- Gave 50 speeches and presentations
- New partnership agreement between BC and China[38]
- Establishment of RMB Settlement Centre in Toronto[39]
- Connected BC cherry and blueberry producers to Chinese buyers[40]

2015 – 2016 (Per Annual Report) [41]

- Attracted approximate $1.7 billion in new investment
- 110 meetings with government officials
- 202 meetings with corporate executives
- Participated in 13 trade events
- Gave 19 speeches and presentations
- Facilitated strategic partnership agreement on low carbon development
- Advanced international education partnership with Japan
- Telecommunication partnership between TELUS and Huawei
- Oversaw agreement for Harbour Air to expand sea plane commuter services in China
- Convinced China Eastern/Yunnan Airlines to launch direct flights to Vancouver

In summarizing these reports, it would appear Ben Stewart achieved much as BCSRA. What is glaringly obvious is the constant use of keywords such as "played an important role", "supported meetings", "witnessed the signing", "delivered remarks", etc. One of the most commonly used words throughout these two reports was "discuss(ed)" – 85 times.

While these annual reports praise Stewart's role as Trade Commissioner, there are reasonable grounds to question the way performance is being evaluated. As key performance metrics were jointly developed between Stewart and The Ministry of International Trade[42], there can possibly be a conflict of interest that may arise in performance evaluation. This fact, that the performance metrics had to be developed jointly between Stewart and the Ministry, suggests not only Stewart, but also the government lacked experience and oversight in setting foreign policy objectives.

Duplication of work is also another concern, since Canada already has significant presence of trade commissioners based in China[43]. This raises questions regarding the value added services that Stewart's role provides. Arguably, Stewart's office could have been based in Canada's foreign missions locations to minimize operational and capital costs. This would not only improve the level of cohesion with the Federal Government, it could have been more effective in projecting the Province's interest abroad.

Lastly, the available reports seem to be quite biased in Stewart's favor as they do not discuss any challenges the Trade Commissioner may have faced as the BCSRA. These reports praise Ben Stewart's efforts, but we found no evidence of any contracts or trade deals which benefited British Columbians. There is little the public can work with when it comes to verifying his performance as B.C.'s Trade Commissioner to Asia. This gap is mostly due to the haphazard manner in the way Stewart's position and the reporting infrastructure had been set up shortly after the re-appointment of Christy Clark as B.C.'s premier in 2013.

Summary

This report explored the relationship of Ben Stewart as B.C.'s Special Representative in Asia and the cost benefit analysis of this position. Through extensive research of this role and office operations in Beijing, there are several reforms that must be addressed to generate cost savings for the Province.

The provincial government is unnecessarily spending millions of tax payer dollars to maintain a trade office in Beijing, with no clear benefit for the citizens of the province.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is to shut down the Beijing office entirely. This will save the Province in excess of $3 million per year of tax payers' money. Once the office in Beijing is closed, it is financially prudent to have B.C.'s Trade Commissioner based in the Province of B.C. or at a *Canadian Foreign Mission office.* This measure would eliminate excessive cost on rent and support staff. It can also enable the Province to better coordinate Foreign Trade Policy objectives with assistance and influence of the Federal Government. We also recommend a comprehensive parliamentary review of the Ministry's contracted help to ensure that the Province is putting British Columbians first in all its dealings, including employment.

The second recommendation is to simply dissolve the position of the BCSRA, as Mr. Stewart has resigned from this position and no one has been hired in his place.

Should the Province feel it is necessary to continue to employ someone in the role of B.C.'s Special Representative in Asia, there are certainly plenty of recommendations that can be made:

1) Significant changes have to be made in the reporting and appointment process of the Trade Commissioner post to make it more transparent to the general public, particularly when it comes to performance evaluation. To eliminate conflict of interest between the Ministry and its representatives abroad, the Ministry should be the only sole party to develop the performance metrics. Another alternative is to use standards set by more experienced government agencies such as Global Affairs Canada. This can ensure a more transparent and structured reporting process regarding the Province's Foreign Affairs activities.
2) This position should be led by an individual with significant Foreign Service experience to ensure that the Province is being led and looked after by only the best and brightest British Columbia has to offer. This can ensure greater traction on covering foreign trade.

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