

University of Northern British Columbia Convocation

Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell
Prince George
Friday, May 26, 2006

Chancellor Bentley, President Jago, Mayor Kinsley, distinguished guests, graduands, ladies and gentlemen. It is my great honour to be part of Convocation 2006 at UNBC, and to congratulate all of you who will receive your parchments today.

You're graduating from an excellent university that in less than a dozen years has helped change the academic landscape of British Columbia – and beyond.

Everyone here today deserves credit for that. A university like UNBC becomes great because of far-sighted administrators, dedicated faculty, talented and hard-working students, and families giving those students emotional and financial backing.

Of course, it also helps to have communities that support post-secondary education, and a government committed to expanding options for students.

Since we assumed office, we've increased UNBC's operating funding by more than a third. In return, UNBC is continuing to produce graduates who fill the North's needs in very important ways – from helping Aboriginal students succeed, to providing health-care workers and other professionals whose work is vital to the economy of the North, and to its quality of life.

I know most of UNBC's graduates choose to work in the North. The great thing is that you have a choice. Many of you already have jobs – largely because UNBC's grads are so highly thought of – but also because you have excellent timing.

The unemployment rate in B.C. last month was 4.5 per cent – a 30-year low. A million jobs will be opening up in B.C. over the next decade. Seven hundred thousand of them – the best 700,000 – require advanced education. And you have it! I congratulate you for investing your time and energy in preparing to enter that job market.

And now I'd like to speak about someone at the other end of his career – someone whose vision and dedication during the past 11 years has made a huge difference to UNBC.

Charles Jago has contributed so much to so many in this province. He's an advocate for the North, for Aboriginals, and for the environment. And I thank him for what he has given to our province's post-secondary system.

Those of you who are graduating today share something with Charles Jago – you are moving on to new, exciting challenges.

I wish you all the best and brightest of futures. And I congratulate you for the accomplishments that have brought you to today's convocation.

Thank you.