

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address at University of Northern British Columbia
November 21, 2002

Check Against Delivery

It's a pleasure to be here today and to make this announcement.

In March 1998, the people of Prince George and the people of the North came together and said it was time for urgent action. It was time for us to start investing in the institutions of learning and facilities in the North to make sure the people of the North have the services they deserve.

It was on April 24th, just a year and a bit ago, that we announced we would make sure British Columbia had a rural and remote health-care strategy that met the needs of the people who live in the vast regions of our province. We underlined a 10-step plan.

The most important component of any health-care system is the people who are in it – the doctors, the nurses, the licensed practical nurses, the caregivers. Between 1980 and 2001, there was not one increase in the number of doctors who graduated from our institutions of higher learning. That was in spite of the fact that our population grew by 50 per cent.

One of the things we committed to do was increase the opportunities for the young people of British Columbia – in fact, the young people across our country – to get their medical training here in B.C.

I want to pay special tribute to my colleague in cabinet, the Minister of Advanced Education, Shirley Bond. It is no small task, with the financial challenges we face in this province, to come up with the resources necessary to expand the number of people who graduate from our medical schools.

Shirley has managed within our financial constraints to come up with a program that will allow us to increase the number of doctors who graduate from universities in British Columbia from 128 to 224 by 2005. I want to say thank you, Shirley, for that.

Often in British Columbia we don't recognize when we are leading the country. We are leading the country with the establishment of the B.C. Life Sciences Centre.

On behalf of all British Columbians I want to thank Colin Kinsley, your mayor in Prince George, and Charles Jago, the president of UNBC. It was Colin and Charles who said to us: "Let us work together with [University of B.C. faculty of medicine dean] John Cairns at the University of British Columbia. We're not asking for too much; we're asking to be part of the solution."

Through working with John Cairns and the University of British Columbia and the folks at the University of Victoria, the University of Northern British Columbia is now going to be graduating medical students as part of our B.C. Life Sciences Initiative.

The first 24 students will commence their studies in 2004. We are looking forward not just to them studying here and being part of the medical facilities at UNBC, but to them having their residencies here and developing the skills to serve people in the North.

Today I'm pleased to say that we are going to be unveiling a \$12-million Health Sciences Centre right here at UNBC, which I know will reflect the spirit of the North.

It will provide for the people who want to be part of a medical institution that will be second to none in Canada. It reaches out in a collaborative model to make sure the challenges that are faced in the rural and remote practice of medicine are confronted.

We're doing that with our doctors, and we're very excited about that. We've also been doing that with nurses: I'm sure you're aware that 40 additional nursing spaces are available at the College of New Caledonia.

We have also added to the number of technology students at the University of Northern British Columbia. I want you to know why we're doing this.

We're not doing it because it's politically convenient to do it. We're doing it because it's the right thing to do. We have an excellent institution that's growing in reputation, and every single British Columbian – regardless of the region they live in – can take pride in it. I want to congratulate the leadership at UNBC for what they have done.

I'm also pleased to announce today that the B.C. Knowledge Development Fund will provide \$322,000 for equipment for UNBC's new social sciences research lab.

This is important because part of what we want to do is make sure we understand the challenges that are faced in rural and remote communities. We understand the contribution that they make to our province; we want to understand how we can provide services better to people throughout British Columbia.

Taken together with the other commitments, we have now committed \$2.8 million to research here at UNBC. On behalf of all of my colleagues and on behalf of all of the students who will take advantage of these programs, I want to say again that I appreciate the contribution and the constructive approach that has been taken by the leadership of the University of Northern British Columbia.

This is a great university. It's got a great future, and I know it will be the model that others will follow. I want to thank Charles and Colin for their contribution. I want to congratulate John Cairns for his vision of the B.C. Life Sciences Centre and I want to thank all of you for being here today. Thank you very much.