

**Speech to Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
Premier Gordon Campbell
March 31, 2004**

Check Against Delivery

One of the things we've kept our eyes on is the future. We try to focus on where we want to be in 2015 and 2025, and how we get there. I often ask people if they would like the government to spend more time thinking short-term - trying to get a really good headline - or trying to build the foundation and quality of life that people in British Columbia can take advantage of, can build on and, most importantly, can give to the next generation.

One challenge for those of us who are my age is to be open enough and to be strong enough to give the next generation those opportunities. I believe those opportunities start with education. They start with a strong public education system in K-to-12, but they also start with the recognition that you need to go from Grade 12 to the end of your life, learning, building knowledge, building skills, and finding new things that you're passionate about and pursuing them.

We've asked ourselves some critical questions. First, how do you create the kind of institutions of excellence that we want for the people that we serve? People are really consistent in responding. One of the things they say to you, as elected officials, is: if you can get the politics out of advanced education, we'd be better off.

So we went, and we talked with students, and we talked with administrators, and we talked with faculty members across the province.

One of the things that we believe are one of the hallmarks of what we're trying to do in British Columbia is to establish educational autonomy for each of our institutions. Let them define their future. Let them pursue their goals. Let them create the areas of excellence that they know that they can build on, that they know are important to the people they serve. I think that sometimes we can forget that most of our education systems or institutions are building themselves in concert with students, in concert with student demand, in concert with the demands of the community that they live in. So educational autonomy was a critical component of our strategy of moving forward.

Some people disagree with that. Actually, people love educational autonomy, as long as they agree with the decisions you make.

When they don't agree, they come to us and they say: will you please change that decision. And we keep saying: no, we won't.

I want to recognize the people who are in this room that I get a chance, on occasion, to work with, and I know that our Minister of Advanced Education, Shirley Bond, works with them on a consistent basis. Frankly, they are a true asset to all of us in British Columbia.

Martha Piper from the University of British Columbia has been a great educational leader, as has David Turpin from the University of Victoria.

Roger Barnsley is here, and Roger is going to be president of one of British Columbia's newest universities. They haven't decided on the name yet, but it will be in Kamloops. We opened that up to his community, and we said: tell us what you'd like in a university, and it'll be great.

I didn't see Skip Bassford here today.

Rich Johnston is here from Malaspina University College. Rich, it's great to have you here. Malaspina, as you know, is on Vancouver Island and offers a whole array of programs up and down the coast. I was at the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities last week, and they are very excited about the opportunities that Malaspina offers.

Charles Jago is with us today from the University of Northern British Columbia. Charles spends an awful lot of time not just working with the people in the communities of the north but tailoring programs, particularly, to meet their needs. He does a great job of that.

Of course, Michael Stevenson is here. Michael is the president of Simon Fraser University - the only university in British Columbia that I ever got a degree from. Thank you very much for the degree, Michael; I appreciate it.

Peter Ricketts is here. Peter is the acting president of the Okanagan University College. I'm going to talk a little bit about that in the future.

Is Rich Skinner here? Rich is here from Royal Roads University in British Columbia.

I wanted to spend a moment to introduce those people. I know you all know them. You know, we count on the educational leadership of our college presidents and our university presidents. We count upon them being driven by their vision of what's going on and sharing that with us. I can tell you: in British Columbia we have been exceptionally lucky. Because of the power of our leadership we have been able to map out the course of the future that I hope will serve the needs of all of the people in British Columbia. I must thank all of you for what you've contributed to our province.

We are in the midst of the largest expansion of post-secondary spaces in the province in the last 40 years. Why? Because the world's changed dramatically in the last 40 years.

One of the things that's most interesting to me, as an elected leader, is how powerful the status quo is. There is a whole sector of society that is far more comfortable dealing with our old problems than they are with contemplating the solutions. We look to our university leaders and our college leaders to help us move through the boundaries of the status quo.

We look to our universities and our colleges, not just to create the ferment of new ideas and the challenges that we all have to face as we look to the future, but to show us our world as it currently is, to help us find a path to future. Our universities and colleges understand the power of the imagination, the power of an idea, the power of research to generate new knowledge and new pathways to a future we want.

But it is important for us to recognize, as well, where we are today.

When I talk to people about many of the demographic changes that have taken place, often it takes them aback. They haven't really stopped and thought about it because we're all in the rush of our day-to-day activities, how we're going to take care of our families, what are we going to do with this problem or that problem. The tyranny of the urgent often overpowers a lot of the bigger opportunities.

Thomas Huxley said: "The medieval universities looked backwards. It was a storehouse for old knowledge. The modern university looks forwards. It is a factory of new knowledge."

There is no more critical time for us to look forward than in these turbulent times. Take a moment and look at the person across the table from you. Do they seem younger this year than last?

I can tell you right now: Robert is no younger; I know he's going to retire this year. Robert is at the leading edge of what many people in our society are doing. The fastest-growing age cohort in our society is 80-years-old-plus.

As we watch our society age, we have to find new ways to deal with the inherent challenges. We have to find new definitions. It's not simply a matter of saying that someone's a senior, and now they're out of the workforce.

Universities and colleges are one of the first places to look at those issues and try to create solutions. You know and I know that there are a lot of bumpy roads between discovering a solution and getting it accepted in the public realm.

It is important for you, as agents of change, to recognize how important you are to our society in Canada and, certainly, in British Columbia. We look at British Columbia and our universities as a major engine of opportunity, for people to pursue their own goals and develop their own ideas.

We watched over the last little while as our universities and colleges have done something that I think, a long time ago, people may not have thought was possible. They've actually come together. They put aside institutional egos. They put aside their institutional barriers and rigidity and asked, How can we work together to meet the needs of the people who live here? How do we disperse opportunity across the province?

We announced last February that we were going to create 25,000 new spaces in universities and colleges across this province between now and 2010.

Now, you may ask yourselves: why 2010? Well, we're going to be hosting the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games in British Columbia in 2010, and you're all invited. This is what is important about the spirit of 2010: it is not just about athletes who do extremely well and end up with the gold medal; it's not simply about our artists and building our culture. It's about searching in ourselves and in our communities for what's the best that we have. It's about making sure that people get the tools to do that.

So as we look to 2010, we look at 25,000 additional spaces. That's twice the rate of growth in the 18-to-24-year-old demographic cohort. We believe that by creating that opportunity for young people, we start to open up their horizons for their futures.

The grade level needed today to get into some programs can be 80, 83, or even 92 per cent.

I can tell you: at 92 per cent, I wasn't getting into university. When I was in Grade 12, all we had to do to get into university was to graduate from high school. It wasn't a matter of graduating in the top percentile; it was simply graduating.

I can remember people from my generation going to university. You know, it wasn't as much fun as they thought, or maybe it was too much fun, and they dropped out in December, after entering in September. They'd say: Oh, I'll just hang around for the next little while. Next year they'd come back and go back, and they'd find out that they didn't much feel like it.

Our young kids aren't doing that. They're working their tails off to try to get into university. They and their parents say: University is the key to the future.

None of us - whether we graduated from university or not - want our parents phoning us every day and telling us how worried they are about us. So what we wanted to do was to create opportunities for young people to pursue their objectives all over the province.

When I first started pursuing a provincial elected office, I was talking to a father and his daughter. She really wanted to get involved in environmental studies. She thought it would be interesting. She was really a little concerned about whether she was going to be able to get into UBC or Simon Fraser. I said: Well, why don't you apply to UNBC? UNBC's got a great program.

Her father's response: "That would cost an awful lot of money, wouldn't it? You'd have to travel up to UNBC, travel home for vacation. You'd have to get room and board. It would cost quite a bit more than if she just went to UBC or Simon Fraser."

That's what most young people in British Columbia used to think. They had to come to Vancouver. They had to come to Victoria.

We're trying to make spaces out in your communities. UNBC is a great example of what happens when you provide access in communities that are a little bit farther away. You get way more participation from people.

So what we've done, right now, with the 25,000 spaces: we've just announced for the first time that there will be a new, comprehensive University of B.C. Okanagan campus, for 4,500 additional students. By 2010, a new Okanagan college will open up to a thousand new students and meet the needs of people throughout the Okanagan. We'll have a new university and a new open university in Kamloops. We're going to focus on distance learning there.

We've also added spaces south of the Fraser River. Simon Fraser University will have a new campus in the Surrey Centre.

To get back to my earlier story about the father and daughter: our estimates are that it saves about \$24,000 or \$25,000 over the course of a four-year degree if a student can be close to home and still close to university and college opportunities.

In the Okanagan region, they had a higher-than-average high school completion rate and a lower-than-average university completion rate. We believe that by putting a University of B.C. campus in the Okanagan, we will see not just a higher high school completion rate, but a higher post-secondary completion rate.

The UBC Okanagan campus will graduate hundreds of students by 2010. Those students, and their local research, will create all kinds of economic opportunities throughout that region of the province.

I can't think of any commitment a government can make that can have as strong a social and economic benefit as investing in advanced education. Our 25,000 spaces reflect that, and reflect the great leadership here.

This investment is timely. Our province is ready to take off. Our province is starting to attract people; for the first time in six years, we've got more people coming to B.C. than leaving.

One of the challenges we face is reminding people how powerful our post-secondary institutions and colleges are in generating social, economic and educational opportunities.

I know you are particularly interested in international education and international exchange. I was in China and in India in November, and people there are very interested in building those exchanges as well.

A great strength of our country is that we have the world within our borders. As we bring the world into all of our institutions, it enriches them.

The real strength of a university is that it opens doors for everyone. It opens doors for learning. It opens doors for research. It breaks down boundaries and the barriers that separate.

As we provide greater access, we have an opportunity to attract people from around the world and across the country, so they can see what a great place this is to live. But we will also be able to say to our high school students: If you get a B or better, 75 per cent or better, there's a space for you; there's an opportunity for you. That's a major step in the right direction.

Education is a tool for everything. When young people graduate, they're in line to earn upwards of a million more dollars more income over their lifetime than those who don't graduate from a university or college. With 25,000 more spaces, we can help the next generation earn an extra \$25 billion over their working lives. That's a significant and powerful opportunity for young people.

And it's essential, because they're going to be able to cope with the world as it changes. When I had my own small company here in B.C. in 1980, faxes hadn't been invented; e-mail was on no one's list. Nothing moved quickly. Nothing happened quickly.

In 1980, there was no CNN. In 1980, we wouldn't have known half of the things that we know today, as quickly as we know them.

Today, everything happens quickly. One of the great cultural shifts that we face is turbulence.

Universities help us build, I think, a framework of values and understanding that allows us to deal with that. University graduates are in a better position to deal with those changes and chart a path through that turbulence, to achieve successful outcomes.

New technology is opening doors for everyone, but also challenging us to provide more opportunities so our young people get the tools they need.

I had a very good friend who used to be an electrical engineering professor at UBC. When I started my political life on the volunteer side, he was running for the school board in Vancouver.

He came to me one day. He showed me this huge calculator worth \$450, and said, watch this – it can do trigonometry!

Today, you get the same thing on a little card for \$8.95, and it has 4,000 times the impact, 4,000 times the power and memory that that did. That's how much our world has changed.

People who have had the advantage of a great education deal with changes like that undaunted, and they build on them. The great obligation you have is to make sure people use the springboard of education to leap any boundaries.

Our challenge in British Columbia is not that we set our sights too high. There is no place in the world that should set their sights higher. There is no place in the world that has more opportunity to reach its goals and objectives. Our challenge is when we set our sights too low and we reach them.

In your hands lies the power of the imagination, the power of ideas, the power of intellectual capital to move us all forward into a healthier, better world.

Our governments wants to work with you. We look to our educational leaders for leadership. We look to them for guidance. We look to them for their imaginations and their passion about those they serve.

And I'll tell you this: in British Columbia they have never let us down.