

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to First Nations Summit
September 28, 2005

Check Against Delivery

Once again I'm in the Squamish territory and being welcomed by you, invited by you to be part of your First Nations Summit. I want to thank the elders who have come today to share their wisdom with us as we strive to build a new relationship that will work for all First Nations people in the province of British Columbia.

I'd also like to take a moment to reflect on the enormous contributions that both George Watts and Larry Guno have made to the people of the province of British Columbia through the leadership that they have shown to all of us. I know the passing of both of them has touched all of your hearts, and I want to say it's touched the hearts of others in British Columbia who got the opportunity to work with them and learn from them as we went ahead.

“We are all here to stay” – those are the first words of the draft new relationship document that is now before us in government and before First Nations across British Columbia. It seems like such a simple declaration for us to make, and yet it's taken us so long to make it.

I want to say thank you and to recognize the courage of the First Nations leadership that have been part of helping us draft the new relationship document, bring it forward and help give it life. I want to thank you for being part of that.

It is important I think that First Nations leadership came together in Salish territory last spring and signed their own historic leadership accord between the Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, working shoulder to shoulder on our collective challenges.

Let me say to the Summit today, at the outset, because I've heard of some of the commentary, that the new relationship is in some way thought of as a replacement for treaty negotiations: it is not felt that way at all by government. Government remains committed to treaty negotiations; we think they are important. We think we can learn more.

As Chief John just shared with us from the podium, I'll just share with you from the podium. As we carry on with our treaty negotiations, we want to build an environment of trust and collaboration and understanding that allows us to come to a conclusion of treaties. I think that's going to be a critical part of what we do as we move forward.

So to all of you who've spent so much time and so much energy and put so many resources towards finding a treaty settlement, I want to say thank you. You should know

our commitment to treaties is maintained, and we will continue to pursue successful treaty resolutions.

I'm very pleased to be here today with the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Tom Christensen. Tom is the MLA for Okanagan-Vernon, and he has this at the centre of his agenda, not just for his ministry, if you want, but for all of government. I'm pleased that he could take some time to be with us today, as well.

I'm also joined on my left by the deputy minister to the Premier, Jessica McDonald. And Minister Christensen has with him Lorne Brownsey who is the deputy minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation.

The discussion has grown with regard to the new relationship document in recent weeks, and the focus has really been on government trusting, acknowledging, and recognizing First Nations and your leadership.

Let me say to all of you in this room that I understand the courage it takes for those who are part of the leadership council to step up and try and help us forge this new relationship. We are working together on this. We are working step by step, but we are working with their guidance.

I can tell you that Chief Edward John has been forthright, direct, and, I believe, very constructive with regard to helping myself and the government understand the direction that we must go. I want to acknowledge that and recognize that and say thank you to Chief John for that leadership.

You've worked a long time. I know that. For many of you I know that your feeling will be that you have accomplished not very much in that time. So as we try to build this trust, I hope that we will be able to show you by our actions, as well as by our words, that we mean what we say when we say we want all First Nations to be part and parcel of an exciting future for all of us in Canada.

I think that I noticed in *The Globe and Mail* today that the headline was: "The end of two solitudes." One of the things that I have been pointing out is that for too long we've thought of the two solitudes as English and French Canada. There is a third solitude that has been left out in Canada, and that is the First Nations and Aboriginal people of Canada. We have to have the end of the third solitude as well.

So today let me say to you as we start that my government's commitment is unwavering to try to build this new relationship of trust and understanding, respect and reconciliation.

What is this really about for us? It's about how we do business with First Nations and government and people. It's about how First Nations work with the provincial government to inform us and advise us on the actions we should take as we move ahead.

I've had meetings with many representatives of local governments from across the province over the last few days. They are anxious to be part of building a strong, collaborative, and positive relationship with First Nations in British Columbia, and they recognize that they have to take steps to do that, that this is about making decisions collaboratively, sharing resources and sharing benefits and, in some cases, sharing our dreams about what we can accomplish.

Our relationship, I would hope, would be characterized by respect and by the recognition of aboriginal rights and title. The new relationship will find its home in a revitalized treaty process, in accommodation arrangements having to do with lands and resources and social programs designed to meet the needs of aboriginal communities, and in a shift of the cultural reality of the province so that the contributions of First Nations are fully recognized and fully valued.

But I should emphasize that I'm not here to tell you what the new relationship plan is. I am hoping and asking that you feel comfortable and confident in telling us what will be best for you and for your communities. We do not intend to come from Victoria, as so often happened in the past, and tell you this is the plan. We intend to ask how should we do this, what steps should we take, and how can we show through our actions that this new relationship has true meaning for each of you in each of your communities and in your hearts?

We started with five goals for all British Columbia, as you know. We said to the leadership that those five great goals should be shared, and, in fact, we will fail in reaching any of those great goals if we do not include First Nations and First Nations people in achieving them.

We can't become the best educated and most literate province in the country and the continent if First Nations people are not graduating at the same level as other British Columbians, if First Nations people don't have the same level of skills development and literacy training, and if we don't find culturally significant and effective ways of making sure those opportunities are available.

We can't be the healthiest jurisdiction ever to host an Olympics if First Nations people still have health determinants that are so far below those of the general population.

We can't provide the kind of support that we want to provide to our seniors, to children at risk, to people with lower life expectancies if we do not include First Nations in devising plans and actions that will help us achieve those goals.

We certainly won't have the strongest economy in the country if First Nations do not share in economic prosperity, in jobs and opportunities.

I hope it's important for you to know that we understand that the words that were said in the throne speech, the words that were said when the government was sworn in, require

action to back them up, and we want to take those actions in a way that is constructive and helpful and reflective of the goals and objectives that you have.

We've concluded agreements-in-principle with regard to treaties, and we're going to work hard with those who are involved at that stage and in moving on to the final agreement stage.

We have 300 agreements with First Nations in economic development, and forestry, and oil and gas, and parks, and in a number of key social sectors, including education, and child and family services. But we must do more, and we will.

I've asked Tom Christensen, the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, to drive our efforts so that we are acting quickly and expeditiously and effectively in meeting our goals, in collaboration with First Nations. To support that vision, the budget update included \$100 million for a new First Nations new relationship fund. Over the coming months we will work directly with the leadership council to finalize the official terms of reference for the new fund.

Our goal is to provide tools for training and support and development to help reduce the dependence of First Nations people on outsider advisers. But you should know this: the goal, the draft plan, the actions, the intended activities that will be taken out of that First Nations new relationship fund will be initiated by your leadership. We need to hear from you about how we can best and most effectively meet those goals and those objectives, and I am looking forward to the work with the leadership council to finalize those activities.

The fund is intended to create a legacy of knowledge and skills and employment and wealth and leadership and capacity for your children, for your grandchildren, and for future generations. We've committed the money, we will work together, and I am hopeful that by the new year we will be able to legislate the framework for that agreement so that the plan will meet your needs across the province.

I've also undertaken, on behalf of the premiers' upcoming out of the Council of the Federation, that we move on the national stage as well to build a new relationship, a relationship in which First Nations are no longer the victims of Confederation but they are partners in it. You are the founding nations of a nation that is the envy of the world, but your place within Canada at times has been like a shadow to all else that we have achieved as a country. Over the next decade Canada must close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

First Ministers will be meeting in British Columbia in Kelowna in November. We'll be meeting with national Aboriginal leaders. And over the next eight weeks I will be meeting directly with your leadership; I'll be meeting with Grand Chief Phil Fontaine and all of the regional chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations. I'll be meeting with the Métis Nation; I'll be meeting with the Inuit Nation. I'll be meeting with other aboriginal leaders directly to hear what their plans are, to close some critical gaps that we have in Canada.

The first is the education and skills gap. It's recognizing that we must close that gap, and we have set a timeframe. I think the Assembly of First Nations felt that a ten-year strategy and plan would be a constructive and positive way to go. I'll meet with them in October to hear what their plans are.

I'll be meeting with the premiers of all the provinces and territories across the country, and I will finally be meeting with the Prime Minister prior to the meeting in British Columbia. Our goal is to close the education gap, to close the health care gap, to close the economic development gap, and to help establish a new relationship in all of the provinces of the country as we move ahead. We need to look for national solutions on Aboriginal health and housing and education, but we need to recognize that provinces, as well, have got to be part of those solutions.

Again, I am looking to the leadership of First Nations and Aboriginal leaders to help draft that plan and put it in place so that we can move forward in concert.

B.C. chiefs have been committed to these ideas for some time, and I hope that we can create a made-in-B.C. approach that will work for each of you, but I hope that we can set an example for Canada, from coast to coast to coast.

For too long - and I acknowledge this - we did follow a path of denial – denial of rights, of culture, of opportunity, and of equality. In fact, if we look at what our goals are, what our objectives are, I think we have to recognize that First Nations and Aboriginal communities in Canada have been failed, and we must move forward to rectify that. We will try to do that in a way that allows all First Nations and all Aboriginal people to reach their full potential, just as we want all Canadians to be able to reach their full potential.

The path that we have chosen to walk will be a long one I am sure. It will not always be a level path; sometimes it will be uphill; sometimes it will be a difficult path for us to walk. But I am confident that with the guidance of First Nations leaders, with perseverance on behalf of all of us, we can find resolution to these issues, resolution where we are walking together and we are building the kind of relationship that is so critical to our long-term future.

On behalf of my colleagues in the House – and I should say that I believe these goals are shared by all members of the Legislature, not by one side of the Legislature or the other – let me say that I hope this is a time where we turn to the future. I would like this to be a time when we say that today was a start of a new relationship, a new relationship that will last for generations, a new relationship that allows us not to forget the past but to stand free of its shadows and no longer be separated by lines that never should have been drawn on the land in the first place.

The history of First Nations in B.C. is written upon the land of this province. We stand at the edge of a new history, a history that will be written in the lives and successes and prosperity of all the people of British Columbia, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. It

is a future that we can shape if we stay true to the spirit that has brought us this far: trust, reconciliation, respect, honour, responsibility, openness, recognizing that we share our goals, and we can, in fact, achieve our goals.

I'd like to say, again, thank you to all of you for being here today; thank you for inviting me to be part of this.

I am glad to answer any questions that you may have. Let me just deal specifically with two that were raised by Chief John in his opening comments.

First, you should know that we are in process of reviewing all legislation and regulations to ensure that it does not bind us against implementing a new relationship. We will involve you in that review. It will be comprehensive, and it will be ongoing.

Secondly, let me say to Chief John – he has raised this with me before, but I should say it to all of you today – we have heard the concerns of how we have approached the litigation in the courts. We understand that our litigation strategies in the past have been offensive, and that was certainly not what our intention was.

I've instructed the Attorney General and the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation to review our litigation strategies and to come back with a report to us as soon as possible so that when we are in court, if we are in court, we are able to argue in court in a way that is respectful to you, to First Nations, and to the history and spirit of what we are trying to do as we build this new relationship.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair; I appreciate the time.