

Premier Gordon Campbell
Speech to Union of B.C. Municipalities Annual Convention
September 29, 2005

Check Against Delivery

It's great to be here. Thank you very much. It is great to be back as you celebrate your hundredth anniversary – your centennial.

Before I get to that, I just want to say one thing. This morning, in Vancouver, while it was pouring rain, there were 50 to 60 of your colleagues who were out with me on the street corner trying to get people to buy papers for the Raise-a-Reader literacy campaign, and I want to thank all of you for doing that.

I also want to thank your executive and all of the people who have organized this convention, because I know these are pretty critical times and this really is a milestone.

Just think about this: 100 years ago the UBCM was formed. Think how the world has changed. Think of all the things that have gone by. Many of them have been unnoticed, many unmeasured, but you know, we will be forever altered by the experiences, the decisions, the challenges that were met by representatives of local government over that 100-year period.

In 1905 the entire provincial government's budget was \$2,566,038.31. Today it's almost \$33 billion. A hundred years ago the entire provincial health budget was \$105,350. Let me put that in context for you. That same \$105,350 would pay for four and a half minutes of health services today.

The world has changed. Actually, 100 years ago they didn't even keep track of the number of automobiles that they had in British Columbia. They started that in 1907. Do you know how many cars there were here then? 175.

There were no high-rises. There were no cell phones. There were no blackberries - well, not the technological kind of blackberries. The world was different. No bridges over Burrard Inlet, no bridges over the Fraser River.

Some things seem to have changed, but then again, when you look back, there's some things that stayed the same. The UBCM is still here. As Aaron mentioned, the Premier of the day was Richard McBride. Now, Richard was elected after B.C. had experienced seven Premiers in ten years. It's beginning to sound familiar isn't it?

McBride inherited a massive debt. He had solutions, though. One of his solutions was he was going to demand a better deal from the federal government. He was going to tap into the province's incredible resources, and he was going to invest in transportation infrastructure. This guy was smart. It's amazing when you think about it. The UBCM and

B.C.'s premiers' solutions to the problems we face have stayed exactly the same over 100 years.

I'm sure this isn't true, but it feels like Richard Taylor has been the executive director for the whole 100 years of this organization. What a job Richard Taylor and all of his staff have done at the UBCM, and more importantly, what a job all of you have done at the UBCM. What a job your executive, your leadership, Aaron and all of his executives, have done as you have moved this organization through to a whole new generation of service for the citizens of our great province. I want to thank you. I want to thank you for perseverance, for your commitment, for your good judgment and for your relentless pursuit of changes that will make a difference in people's lives in every single community of this province. You deserve our praise for that.

You are in the midst of creating a brand-new model of collaborative community government in Canada. Tomorrow you're going to hear from the Prime Minister. Now, last night at the reception there were a few of you that thought that I might be upset that I'd been bumped from the traditional Premier's spot for the Prime Minister. Look, for 635 million bucks, I'll move back to Monday if you want me to.

I'll be surprised if the Prime Minister himself doesn't recognize the leadership of this organization, because make no mistake you are setting the national example right here at the UBCM. The new deal that you helped secure will provide federal resources directly to the UBCM, directly to you, for you to decide how they can do the most good for the people and the citizens that you serve. Believe me, that's groundbreaking, and that's new. The UBCM can take an awful lot of credit, because over the years, the UBCM has worked tirelessly to be a voice for all municipalities, from the smallest to the largest. It's recognized for its fairness, for the equitable nature in which it treats all its delegates, and I think we shouldn't underestimate the drive and the commitment that that takes, and again, I want to say thank you for that.

A hundred years from now what will people see? I hope that they will look back at this time in our province as a pivotal time, a time when we created a whole new collaborative relationship between all of the governments that serve us as citizens. I hope they'll look back and say this was the decade when British Columbians became central to Canada's national objectives as a Pacific nation, when Canada's gateways to the Asia-Pacific were built and opened wide to communities not just through British Columbia but across our country.

I hope they will look back and they will say this was the decade that opened up the north and diversified our economy as never before. I hope they will say this was a decisive decade that established a new relationship with First Nations, the decade that firmly established British Columbia as a national leader.

We all must use this time, we must use these opportunities, to build on the economic and fiscal foundation so we have stronger, healthier communities across the province. We must embrace the changes that confront us and surround us and work to understand them

and then establish goals that stretch our collective imaginations and challenge us to be the best that we can possibly be, to reach beyond the status quo and conventional wisdom. And I've watched you and I know we can do this as British Columbians if we commit to do it together.

We have a chance to seize this moment and to realize the full potential of the imagination, the creativity and the drive of all of our people in this great province. This is not a time for timidity of purpose. This is a time for us to think long-term. This is a time for us to chase great goals that challenge us to bring out our best.

We didn't win our Olympic bid against strong international competition because we sold ourselves short. We won it because we worked together and we remembered that when British Columbians commit to something and work together, there is nothing that we can't achieve together. The will to excel and the confidence to reach for the best in education, in health care and social supports, in environmental management and sustainability, in job creation: that's the spirit of British Columbia.

We've set five great goals for ourselves. They're goals that stretch us all, that ask us all to reach. They oblige us to try to out-perform the competition in key areas that make us leaders in social innovation, but together, they point to a whole vision for British Columbia and a new blueprint for social development, and the UBCM is a critical part of our achieving those goals.

We're going to have to reach them together. I'll ask the UBCM to help find the right benchmarks for measuring our progress over the next ten years and to help us map a course for all British Columbians. Together we've been building a new model of community collaboration: the community charter; the mountain pine beetle action plan; the community opportunities task force; the task force on homelessness, mental health and addiction services; drought management; emergency response. All of those are steps along a new road to providing for coordinated, citizen-centred, integrated services that reflect today's realities and needs.

To enhance our growing partnerships, I want to assure that UBCM has a new presence in Victoria. For years you have been looking to replace the current Municipal House with a new heritage-style building on a different site near the Legislature. In recognition of 100 years of service at the UBCM, I can tell you today that the province will donate the land required for a new Municipal House in Victoria. Today we have 509 Government Street in mind. If that doesn't work, we will find another site that does work for the UBCM as we create a stronger presence and a more lasting partnership.

I'm confident that Municipal House will reflect the best of your communities. Let's highlight B.C. products, and most importantly, let's build Municipal House in Victoria with the best building product in the world – B.C. wood. And to make it even more interesting, let's make sure we're using pine beetle-enhanced wood from British Columbia, Canada.

There's more we can do. A couple of weeks ago Aaron came into my office, and he was joined by Richard and Marvin, and they talked to me about the UBCM's leadership academy. It's amazing what we ask for from local leaders of government. It's amazing what they've contributed to our province over our history and over 100 years. The great mayor of Vancouver Gerry McGeer obviously was a member of UBCM. It was a UBCM member, Pete Lester, the mayor of Prince Rupert, who first came out strongly in favour of term limits. He suggested 36 years was about right.

The innovation just keeps rolling in and rolling in. I just talked to Jerry Fernie, and Jerry agrees with term limits. He thinks life is a good term.

We want to make sure we continue to build our leadership at the municipal and local level. So in recognition of the hundredth birthday of the UBCM the province will provide a million-dollar start-up grant for your leadership academy to make sure we have the best in local leadership across British Columbia.

We're breaking new ground together, and one of the things that I think is most exciting about the leadership academy is that the UBCM has agreed that First Nations leadership will also be able to take advantage of that as they build their capacity and move to the future.

We're breaking new ground. The community opportunities task force is exploring collaborative new measures to make B.C. a leader in social innovation at the community level. It's looking at new approaches to strengthen economic growth and community capacity through regulatory reform, revenue sharing, and service delivery reform. It's not about the status quo; it's about looking at the world today and responding with a new blueprint for social development that requires collaborative leadership with focus on results and real services.

Nowhere is that need more profound than in emergency preparedness. If we've learned anything from our own emergencies, from the tsunami last year, from Katrina, from Rita, it's that we have to do more to be prepared. That's why we've provided \$2.5 million to the UBCM for local emergency planning and \$1 million to our coastal communities to improve tsunami preparedness. It's why we're investing \$2 million to help local governments improve community wildfire protection and to deploy community sprinkler units where they're most in need. It's why we're investing \$1.5 billion over the next 15 years to make sure that all of our schools are completely up to seismic standards in British Columbia. All of that work is ongoing, and it will help make our communities safer places.

But today it's obvious that communication is a critical part of our emergency preparedness. When a crisis strikes, access to the right information in a timely manner is critical. Better services require better communication. Half the battle is simply just knowing who to call, where to call for the help that's available.

So today I can tell you that the province is going to strive to become the first province in Canada to put in place a provincewide 211 service. United Way is already working on a 211 service, but we would like to reach out and include public, non-profits, and private sector in developing one-stop access to a wide range of community and social services. There's a real need to help citizens connect with the programs that are there to serve them. A new blueprint for social development demands that we work collaboratively to meet the needs for services available in the private and the volunteer sectors.

Surely, today it should be possible to have one phone number for referral to basic human needs resources, like income assistance, housing, and shelter support, food banks or clothing. It should be possible to dial 211 and connect to the services available for child care, early learning, literacy, and other support programs for women, children and families. It should be possible to call one number to find the right resources for employment supports, skills training, transportation assistance, and so on. We're already expanding our nurse line, but it should be possible to dial one number and reach medical information lines, crisis intervention services, MSP, and other health initiatives that are so critical to all of us.

This is a major undertaking, but it's something we can accomplish if we work together. I'm not pretending it can happen overnight, but I wanted to tell you today that the province will work with the UBCM, the federal government, First Nations, the United Way, E-Comm, and the telecommunications industry to prepare a plan.

I am hopeful that plan will be ready for presentation to your area association meetings next year and the final plan will be available at the UBCM convention.

We want to connect people with services that are critical for their quality of life. Working together, I know we can do a better job.

You know, it's interesting because last year when I was in Kelowna, I talked about establishing a Premier's task force on homelessness, mental illness, and addiction services. I want to thank those mayors who were part of that task force, and I want to thank all of you for letting us carry on with that activity. But think of this: many of the mayors came back and said it was the first time we thought of bringing together and integrating and talking with all of those players who were trying to provide those services to people.

Think of how much more we can accomplish when we do that. I think it's critical the way the UBCM has picked up on that activity.

There's 533 new units that are built this year, that weren't there last year. There's more to do. But I know from the meeting we had at the beginning of this week, that all of you are willing to be part of that service to provide real solutions for people in your communities across the province, and to be big enough to find new solutions that actually work. I want to thank you for your leadership on that.

The new \$84-million Canada-B.C. affordable housing and the \$172 million that the province is currently putting in for housing supports – all of these are positive partnerships. They're partnerships that say what can the province do, and what can local government do, and how can the federal government help, and how do we bring those citizen resources together to provide citizen services that actually work?

We also launched, through the UBCM, the \$2-million seniors' housing initiative.

Ida Chong mentioned to you yesterday that when you're 65, you're really only 40. Now you know why Ida's not the Finance minister. I'm just joking, Ida.

Our world is changing pretty dramatically. Its population is growing very rapidly.

We've already given a boost to some of our seniors in February's budget, as you probably know. Those who earn \$15,500 a year or less in income will pay no income tax. Many of the 730,000 British Columbians who watched as their taxes went down, through that budget, were seniors. Even before that budget update, a senior couple earning \$30,000 a year was paying \$930 a year less in taxes than they were in the year 2000.

We reduced or eliminated MSP premiums for 290,000 seniors and their families. We reduced Pharmacare and prescription costs for 280,000 citizens with lower incomes, through fair Pharmacare. Those are just some of the measures that we're taking to advance the great goal of providing the best support services for seniors in the province of British Columbia.

Now we're building on that by renewing the seniors' supplement for some 40,000 seniors, low-income seniors. We're doubling the funding for the SAFER program, the shelter allowance for elderly renters. That's the first increase for SAFER since 1990.

What do those measures actually mean in human terms to people? Let me just give you an example. Today a senior with an annual income of \$12,500 a year who pays \$700 a month in rent in a high-cost area of the province will receive \$2,000 a year from the SAFER program and nearly \$600 from the senior's supplement, which means they will have \$2,536 more dollars in their pocket to take care of themselves and their families.

We're putting \$150 million more into providing for seniors' housing, intermediate and long-term care and assisted living housing, over the next two years to make sure that we meet our goal of making sure there's 5,000 new assisted-living and residential-care beds in communities.

Meeting the challenges of an aging population will task us all. Within a couple of decades one quarter of all British Columbians will be 65 or older.

The Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues is looking for innovative solutions to that specific challenge, and I hope that they will look at issues like mandatory retirement.

Maybe it's time to let people work as long as they want, as long as they can. Surely, we shouldn't be afraid to ask that question.

Seniors are changing. Their needs are changing. The service requirements for them are changing. The communities that meet their needs are changing. We have to change with them.

Fresh, new thinking and concerted action is required to cope with and to conquer another social challenge that we all face. Make no mistake; we all face it: the scourge of crystal meth. It demands our immediate attention. It needs to be stopped before its deathly hold claims the lives of people in our communities, usually young lives.

Strategy papers on how to counter crystal meth have been released, and several initiatives are underway. We intend to announce more in the weeks ahead.

But we do know already that we need more prevention, more enforcement, more harm reduction, and more treatment options. To that end, I am pleased to announce today that we will be providing \$2 million to the UBCM to help your communities fight crystal meth. That will help provide \$10,000 in seed money for community programs in every community in the province that wants to participate. A similar program will be established for First Nations communities in British Columbia.

The Solicitor General will hold regional seminars to help inform you about the plague of crystal meth, what it does to our kids and to those who fall prey to its destructive power.

We know one thing for sure: successful prevention and treatment programs start at the street level where we all live, in local communities. They work when communities drive them. I hope the initiative will help you engage in helping us solve that problem. Young people in British Columbia depend on us doing that.

It's very important, I think, also to reach out to British Columbians and let them know what can happen and what they should look for because this sneaks up on you. If you've talked to anybody who's been involved at all, you know this: crystal meth is a dirty, filthy drug and it ruins people's lives forever.

So we want to make sure that parents know what to look for. We want to make sure communities know what to look for. So today I can tell you that we will be investing another \$3 million in the next year on a major public awareness campaign to educate British Columbians about the lethal nature of crystal meth. We'll invest \$1 million in school-based initiatives and \$2 million on paid media campaigns so parents and community leaders can be part of the solution.

As we add enforcement and legislative tools, we will also provide additional treatment. I can tell you today also that we will be allocating \$2 million for targeted treatment services and programs, like the Meth Kickers program in Kamloops, so that we can provide the treatment that people deserve.

This initiative will go across government. This initiative will be focused in a new secretariat that will be established in the Solicitor General's ministry: the crystal meth secretariat. It will help you look at strategies that you can use that might be effective in your community.

I should say the federal government has already committed and indicated that it is willing to do its part in toughening sentences for dealers and meth labs. We will continue to press for tougher controls on ingredients for crystal meth, like Ephedrine, Psuedoephedrine and other precursors.

We know what we have to do. We just have to come together and do it.

The \$7-million extra that we will provide to this effort, that I've just outlined, will be leading the country. But I can tell you; I've worked with the Premier of Saskatchewan, Lorne Calvert, on this. We took it to the Council of the Federation in August. British Columbia is leading. We're leading in an integrated and aggressive fashion, and we want to continue that leadership because that's how we'll protect our children and British Columbia.

Now, I know that many of you face lots of challenges, still, to maintain the quality of life in your communities. It's critical that you have some resources that you can depend on. Since 2001 we've maintained the basic funding level for small-community protection and regional grants, unconditional grants.

Today I am pleased to tell you that in 2006-2007 budget year we will begin the process of raising local government unconditional grants for small communities and regional districts. Over the next four years you will see the budget for those unconditional grants double, from \$27 million to \$54 million a year.

That will build on the work of the community opportunities task force. I've asked the chair, Steve Thorlakson, and Ida Chong to be bold, to take a hard look at today's challenges, and to come back to us with recommendations that will help us establish a new model as we move into the next century.

There's no silver bullet here: we all know that. We do know that you need revenue. We also should know by now that new taxes and tax hikes aren't the answer. The key to increased revenue for any government is economic growth.

We've spent the last four years getting our financial house in order. The fundamentals are now right. It's time for us to build on our economic opportunities as we move ahead.

We've tried to do that by using models that reach into communities and regions and says to you: you decide. \$185 million for the northern development initiative is money for northerners to make northern decisions, to solve northern problems.

Thirty million of those dollars, alone - those new dollars - are to attack the pine beetle.

All of that money is to try and provide for long-term plans that allow you to create the kind of interdisciplinary, interregional and thoughtful approach that builds and diversifies your economy for the long term.

That \$30 million for the pine beetle, by the way, is on top of \$103 million that the province is spending and \$100 million that the federal government has already launched.

We will continue to do more, but we will do it with advice from groups like the Cariboo-Chilcotin, like the Omineca, like the Southern Interior people and communities that know what will work, and that is part of the new partnership in British Columbia.

We have just brought in legislation to provide \$50 million to the Southern Interior region, \$50 million to northern Vancouver Island and coastal British Columbia. That is your money. There is only one condition: work together and do what's best for your region - in your minds.

As we look to the future and look to expanding economic growth, as we talked about last year, we've doubled the funding for tourism in British Columbia. There's \$25 million for UBCM's tourism strategy. There's \$12 million for regional tourism initiatives. There are huge opportunities here.

Just think of this: by the end of this year, by the end of 2005, Canada will have approved destination status with China. It's estimated that by 2020, just 15 years into this next century, there will be 100 million Chinese tourists every year. Now, if you were a Chinese tourist and you had your choice of going anywhere in the world, wouldn't you pick the best place on earth to visit?

We shouldn't take our province for granted. Imagine what it will be like to land at the new great port of Prince Rupert, drive along an improved Highway 16 to Terrace, visit the Nisga'a country, to go to Prince George, to go down through the Rocky Mountains, to go to the new Valemount visitors' centre, to visit in Golden and find out what opportunities there are.

We know today this is going to happen, so we have to get prepared; we have to invest in it. I can tell you this: if you build the product, they will come and your economy will prosper in British Columbia.

The Prime Minister went to China, and he said: come to Canada. Come to the gateway of opportunity - Prince Rupert, British Columbia and the Lower Mainland, Vancouver and Delta ports in British Columbia - and you will have opportunity in North America.

We are the Pacific gateway. We are the nation's future on the Pacific. We must all reach out to take advantage of that, and British Columbians will benefit when we do.

I should tell you that the federal government has been very positive as we have approached this agenda. You know, we first announced our goals for that three years ago at this convention in Whistler. We talked about the largest single comprehensive transportation plan that we'd had in the province for a long, long time. Ocean ports, airports, roads. We want to open British Columbia. When we have people come here we want to show them what our province has to offer.

We're doing that with the new gateway visitors' centre in Golden and in Osoyoos. We'll do it in Prince Rupert. There's huge opportunities for us, and we can take advantage of them.

I'm pleased that the federal government is looking at working with us on building a true partnership that all British Columbians and, importantly, all Canadians can take advantage of.

In April of this year, you were the first to sign the agreement that will see \$635.6 million over five years of federal gas tax funding going right back to your communities. That's new money, and it will help you move forward. It will help you have cleaner air and cleaner water and better wastewater and sewage treatment. It will help to make better rapid transit decisions and road rehabilitation projects. It will help you improve your energy efficiency.

But as one initiative begins I think we all know another one is coming to an end. The new deal is great. But we want the full deal here in British Columbia. The \$800-million local Canada-B.C. local government infrastructure program funded 299 infrastructure projects since 2001. It's a cost share program that allows communities to leverage their investments to maximum advantage.

In this, your centennial year, we should commit ourselves to renewing a program with new funding and new purpose. If there is a will to do this at all levels of government, local, provincial and federal, I'm prepared to go our Treasury Board and say to our Treasury Board: think long term. Imagine where we can go when we work together, and let's commit to a new infrastructure program that will help build communities across British Columbia.

This is your centennial year. You know that good government is really about building strong relationships and good partnerships, government-to-government partnerships, public-private partnerships, people working together for progressive change that improves the lives of those that we serve. That's the new blueprint for social development. The new blueprint for economic growth and social enhancement demands that we dream big dreams and that we reach for the best. It requires us to innovate, to adapt, to learn, to view change not as a threat but as a welcome chance to chart a better future.

Our opportunities in this province are boundless. It's hard to believe that it's not so long ago that modern-day British Columbia was forged from the banks of the Fraser River as

Governor James Douglas raced to bring British law to our land ahead of American annexation in the midst of the 1850 gold rush. As we know, 1858 was not the beginning of our history, that the history of our founding people stretches back millennia. But 1858 was the year when the foundation stone upon which our province stands was laid. In 1958 British Columbians celebrated the centennial of the birth of British Columbia's economy. We're now almost 50 years past that date. In 2008 British Columbia will celebrate its 150th anniversary, its sesquicentennial. It's time to again reflect on the significance of that milestone. As time passes we gain better understanding of who we are, what we've gone through and equally, of what we can do.

In the next few years we have an unprecedented opportunity for celebration – of centennials of small towns and large, of this organization, of the 200th anniversary of Simon Fraser's journey, all culminating in the 2010 Olympics. We have an opportunity for a true community and cultural renaissance, to build a greater understanding of ourselves, of our culture and of our history as we invite the world to our doorstep.

Today I call on all leaders of this province, local, provincial, First Nations, to seize this opportunity to celebrate and better understand our shared history. Look ahead. Look ahead and see a province with the best-educated, most literate people in the world. Look ahead and see a province with clean and abundant water to drink and cleaner air for all of us to breathe. Look ahead to a province that is the most physically fit and healthiest jurisdiction ever to host an Olympics. Look ahead to a province that provides care and support to those most in need. Look ahead to a province that hums with the excitement of our diversity. Look ahead to a British Columbia where our First Nations share in prosperity, economic and educational opportunities. Look ahead to a flourishing economy that provides support for our critical public services. Look ahead. Think of your town in 20 years or 30 or 50. What do you want to see?

Imagine your province. Imagine your country. Imagine Canada. This is your place. Imagine what we can be when we work together. Remember this. Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Let's find that magic together.