

Premier Gordon Campbell
Speech to Union of B.C. Municipalities
September 24, 2004

Check Against Delivery

It is great to be here again, and it's great to see so many of you that have been at the UBCM time after time after time, building your communities, strengthening your communities, and serving the people of your communities.

I think I started coming in about 1984 or 1985 – and things change over that time. We've seen significant changes over the last little while in the people that I know. The first tour I did as the president of the UBCM was to northern Vancouver Island and I visited Gerry Furney in Port McNeill, and he gave me the tour of Port McNeill. Then I visited Port Alice, and the people in Port Alice told me about what they were planning to do and what they hoped to do.

I also got to visit Alert Bay. The first time I met Gilbert Popovich in Alert Bay, he was someone who was strongly in support of his community. He served as mayor of his community for 25 years. He was incredibly proud of the tallest totem pole in the world in Alert Bay. But most importantly, he was proud of the people that he served.

Gilbert's not with us today. He was stricken by cancer. He's been having his radiation treatments, and he's in Alert Bay. I know that all of us send our love and our prayers and our support to him as he goes through this journey because we want Gilbert back here healthy.

It's also great to be in Kelowna right now because, as you know, one of our MLAs from Kelowna has gone through her own journey, and I'm very pleased to say that first really public function she was at was the government reception at the UBCM. That MLA, Sindi Hawkins, is here with us today.

I want to thank all the MLAs who come and attend and work with you, as mayors. I want to thank you for your ongoing communication to them about not just the challenges you face but the solutions that you think we can work on together.

This is an exceptional organization. There was a time when there wasn't nearly as much government participation at the provincial level, and there certainly wasn't as much at the federal level.

So I was pleased to see Minister Emerson and some of our federal MPs here this week. I'm also pleased to see that Stockwell Day is here with us today, your MP for this region. Stock, thanks for coming.

Here we are in Kelowna - 99 years old. Next year will be its centennial. Is there anyplace in British Columbia that represents the B.C. spirit as well as Kelowna does?

Kelowna epitomizes the B.C. spirit and the promise that our province holds for everybody that lives here. When you live in British Columbia, you just know that if you have a dream, you can pursue it; if you have a goal, you can reach it. It just takes time to roll up your sleeves and get to work, and you can get it done: that's what the spirit of British Columbia is all about.

Last year as we met at the UBCM, Kelowna had just come out of an incredible year for this community. You might recall that it was about this time the Myra Canyon trestles had just been burnt to the ground – part of our history in British Columbia, and part of Canada's history. And in less than a year working together, because of the strength of the volunteers here, because of the leadership that we saw from people like Walter Gray and across governments, those Myra Canyon trestles are getting ready to be rebuilt, and in two years they're going to be back in place for all Canadians.

In the last year there's been a new bridge that's announced for the Okanagan Lake, and there's a brand new university campus that's opening here, UBC Okanagan.

The Okanagan and the Southern Interior is ready to take off, and I want to say thanks to all of you in local government for the commitment you've made to build a better future in British Columbia.

The B.C. spirit just keeps on getting stronger, and I know that spirit is shared in all 183 of your communities and regional districts. Like, Okanagan wines, British Columbia just keeps getting better and better. By almost any measure, B.C. is back.

The fact is we've created more than 154,000 new jobs since December, 2001. The fact is that the employment growth rate is now top in Canada. We're number one in job creation.

After three years of hard work, we are one of only two provinces that has not just balanced its budget but has a surplus budget that we can work with. After three years of some pretty bad luck, the stars are finally aligning in our favour.

You called your convention *Harvesting Opportunities*. Let me tell you that one of the great things for me over the last three days has been to meet with delegates from every part of this province. I want to thank you for sharing your optimism with me. I want to thank you for sharing your dreams for your community and your part of the province. It's what I remember British Columbia being like.

I'm glad that, because of your leadership and your commitment, we've been able to restore that sense of confidence in the future of our province.

Three and a half years ago people in British Columbia planted the seeds of hope. They wanted to restore their pride in their province of prosperity. They wanted their children to see their future here at home, not in another place, not in another country. They wanted them to be, right here, in British Columbia.

The people of this province would not be deterred, not by 9-11 or SARS or BSE, not by the avian flu or the softwood dispute or the mountain pine beetle, not by record drought or floods or raging fires. Through it all, the spirit of British Columbia did not lag. The spirit of communities reaching out to help one another did not falter.

Whether it was the towns of Princeton and Abbotsford helping the poultry producers of the Fraser Valley, or the five dozen local fire departments coming together to create a provincial fire department, to help the people of the North Thompson, the Kootenays and the Okanagan - the strength of your communities' generosity prevailed. On behalf of all British Columbia, let me say thank you, thank you, thank you.

We now have a future that is full of promise. Instead of a \$4-billion structural deficit, we can see structural surpluses. For the first time in years we're in the financial position to pursue our goals and aspirations, while doing what you communities do every single year: living within our means.

In community after community after community the watchwords are jobs, investment and growth. Jobs, investment, and growth: that's the B.C. spirit.

B.C. is number one in Canada in housing starts and building permits and residential construction. We're number one in business optimism. Our retail sales have had the strongest quarter in a decade. Last year for the first time in six years people are moving from other provinces back to British Columbia. We're number one in university enrolment. Our net migration to British Columbia in the first quarter of this year is up 67 per cent.

This is a province of opportunity; this is a province of hope. Together, we can harvest those opportunities for every British Columbian.

Instead of people looking for jobs, we have jobs looking for people. That's the B.C. spirit; that's our British Columbia. That's the British Columbia I grew up in, and it's the British Columbia our children can grow up in as we move forward.

Tourism is on the rebound. Technology is back. And the bedrock of our economy - forestry, energy and mining are all coming back and giving communities the solid foundation that they need for their future.

We didn't get here by accident, and it couldn't have happened without you. It couldn't have happened without the leadership you show at the local level.

I was on a tour through the province throughout the spring. I visited about 60 communities. I actually got to the North Island at one point, and I met with three mayors. You know the three mayors: Larry, Gerry and Harry.

Now, Larry, Gerry, and Harry have, actually, an incredible attitude. In spite of all the changes that their communities have gone through, they always look to the future, and they always have a plan to make things better for their communities. I think that is the spirit of local government in British Columbia: recognizing the strengths of our resources are only matched by the strength of the people that live in the communities across this province.

We've come a long way in the last three years, working in partnership with the UBCM. You led the way in Canada with your community charter. For over a year now, you've had the autonomy and the control over your destinies, that other municipalities across the country are wanting.

But there's more to be done as we reshape government to respond to the needs of our communities and the families that live there.

So today I am establishing a community opportunities task force to recommend how we can help you move forward to strengthen your communities, rural and urban, to meet the needs of the families you serve. I've asked former UBCM president Steve Thorlakson to co-chair the task force with Minister Coell. I've asked Frank Leonard, Donna Barnett, Herb Pond to join with them, as I've asked councillors Brenda Denny and Marvin Hunt to do the same.

The community opportunities task force will report back to next year's convention with their recommendations on three areas of concern: regulatory reform, governance, and revenue sharing.

I want to say one thing about revenue sharing. Revenue sharing is not about raising taxes. As we've always said - and I started saying this when I was a member of the UBCM - there is only one taxpayer. We've always recognized that there is one wallet that supports all of our governments - whether they're local or provincial or federal. The question is not whether taxpayers are sending us enough of their resources; the question is how do we deliver services that people need as cost effectively as possible?

We know that if we work together with open minds, with an eye to meeting the diverse needs of the families and the communities that are spread throughout our province, we can take even more positive steps forward.

So here is a first step. We all want to live in safe communities. When you think of it, if people don't feel safe in their communities, the very quality of life that we want to celebrate disappears. If people can't walk down the streets feeling comfortably, if they can't use their community centres and their parks feeling comfortable and confident, we all lose something.

We know that local governments are in the best position to determine the kind of community priorities they have, to build safer communities throughout the province. We also know that they're in the best position to determine policing priorities.

So we said to you prior to the last election that we would return 75 per cent of net traffic fine revenue generated within municipal boundaries to your municipalities within our first term. We talked to your executive, and we thought we would be able to meet that objective in 2005; in fact, we expected to meet it next year. But today I can tell you we are going to meet that commitment this year, one year ahead of schedule.

In fact, we are going to exceed our commitment. Starting this year, 2004, we will be returning 100 per cent of all net traffic fines to the municipalities in your communities. That means more money for your policing, more for crime prevention, and more money to make your communities safer.

Finally, you've made it clear to me at this convention that there is more we can do to improve public safety in our communities, that you support new tools to protect British Columbians from undue harassment and threatening behaviour. And we're going to advance that objective by bringing in a new Safe Streets Act and a new Trespass Act this fall.

I do want to recognize the work that Lorne Mayencourt and the safer streets committees have done. I also want to recognize the work of the UBCM as we move forward. The Solicitor General and the Attorney General look forward to working with you and continuing to build safer communities for all British Columbians.

As we act to make our communities safer, we're also going to act to open up British Columbia. Two years ago in Whistler I laid out a ten-year plan for transportation improvements in our province. From the Kicking Horse Canyon to Prince Rupert, from the Sierra Yoho Desan Road in the Peace, down to the border crossings with the United States, we are opening up our province with transportation improvements that open up social and economic opportunities for everyone who lives here.

Again, it is you at the local level that have helped drive that plan and put it forward, and I want you to know we're going to keep working to open up British Columbia to even more opportunities.

There's nothing more significant in terms of opening up our province, than the B.C. Rail investment partnership. It'll allow you to harvest opportunities that in the past we haven't even been able to imagine, across the north and through the Cariboo-Chilcotin. The new partnership means faster, more reliable service, better access to international markets, 600 new cars and lower shipping rates.

In the next few weeks we're going to hand over a cheque for \$135 million to establish the northern development initiative for northern communities in British Columbia. That northern development initiative will look for northern solutions to northern opportunities and will drive a northern agenda and northern objectives.

The offices will be established in Prince George and will be run entirely by northerners with a fund of \$25 million in perpetuity as part of its operating account.

There will be \$50 million to support cross regional investments directed by the NDI board on behalf of northern communities.

It also includes \$60 million to be divided into four separate accounts: \$15 million each for the Peace, the Northwest, the Prince George region and the Cariboo-Chilcotin-Lillooet. And mayors and regional district chairs and MLAs will provide the advice on how those \$15-million accounts should be invested and when they should be invested to meet the needs of your region.

This is a first. It's a first where a government has said to communities: "You decide. We'll stay out of it. You take it on. You make the choices; you build the futures that you design for your communities." I think that's great for British Columbia.

The CN Rail-B.C. Rail investment partnership is a \$1-billion investment from the private sector in the future of British Columbia.

There are literally billions of dollars coming into our province from the private sector in each area of the province. Just look at mining. After a dismal decade in the 1990s, where one out of two miners lost their jobs, we are finally starting to turn the corner. Ladies and gentlemen, mining is part of British Columbia's future.

It's expected that within the next three years 26,000 new jobs will be created in mining in British Columbia. Mineral exploration is up five times since 2001 - in 2001 about \$25 million in mineral exploration and today it's \$125 million. Mining is back, and it is part of British Columbia's future.

Our forest industry is coming back. For the first time in recent memory we've seen forest companies expand their investment opportunities in British Columbia. Forestry capital investment was up 18 percent last year, and it's going up another 17 percent this year. New investment in logging equipment is up 46 percent.

The changes that we've put in place to make our forest industry more competitive are clearly starting to pay off. They're paying off because the forests ministry and local communities and industry representatives, everyone in the community is working to try and make sure we have a long-term sustainable industry that is recognized across the world for its environmental stewardship.

The entire industry is now feeling the positive effects of our new streamlined Forest Practices Code. We're going to build on that foundation with a forest revitalization strategy.

The coastal industry has seen enormous benefits and the coastal industry touches everyone up and down the coasts of British Columbia.

One of my great stories from this convention was a councillor from Campbell River coming and saying to me: "Ours is the fastest growing community in British Columbia. We have investment coming back to Campbell River. We have housing coming back to Campbell River. We have mining opportunities coming back to Campbell River. We have forestry opportunities coming back to Campbell River. We've got people moving from British Columbian communities to Campbell River. Boy, Mr. Premier, Campbell River is the best place on earth."

I agree with her; it is one of the best places on earth.

Think back three or four years. There wasn't that sense of excitement about the coastal communities. The coastal industry for the first time in a decade will reach its annual allowable cut. That represents a 70 percent boost this year over last.

The coastal industry is booming. Who honestly in this room today would have thought last year that they would have seen a front page story in the Vancouver Sun talking about the labour supply shortage in forestry. Fallers, equipment operators and truck drivers are all in demand again. Our forest industry is taking off. It's competitive, it's innovative and it is the best forest industry in the world.

We're opening up new opportunities for small operators, for first nations, for community forests, with our timber reallocation strategy. It is a good news story, and it's a story that you have helped to build.

In energy it's the same story. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers have told us that in the last year they invested \$3.5 billion in energy in British Columbia. Last year summer drilling was up 119 per cent. The total number of drilling permits was up 61 per cent. These are enormous statistics and have huge benefits.

As someone from the Peace River said to me, if you know someone who wants to make \$80,000 a year who's ready to work hard and will take a couple of months off for vacation, send him to the Peace, send him to the energy industry. We're ready to train him; we're ready to train her. We're ready to allow them to build the kind of future they want for themselves.

It's now estimated that by 2007 we will have 31,000 new energy-related jobs and over \$20 billion of investment. That is great news for B.C.'s families.

Last year I talked to you about independent power production. I want to say thank you again to the UBCM for signing on to the memorandum of understanding that will ensure that we can carry forward with independent power production; \$800 million of alternative energy opportunities are being created. That is the largest investment in energy that we've had in the last 25 years in British Columbia. Again, you've helped create that framework.

Some people have said: what's your strategy on the economy? Well, our strategy is simple, and I think it's obvious. It's called free enterprise, and it is working in the province of British Columbia.

Our tourism industry. It is probably one of those industries that's going to be such an important part of our future. It encourages imagination and innovation. It allows the smallest operator to get in and build themselves and become large operations. The opportunities are enormous.

We are already harvesting the opportunity that the 2010 Winter Olympics presents. We've actually started the largest advertising and marketing campaign that we've had since 1986. It started with our Spirit of 2010 campaign across North America. It continued with our campaign throughout B.C. this last summer. We wanted to be sure that British Columbians remember this is the best place on earth to visit. This is the best place on earth to play. This is the best place on earth to raise a family.

We worked with Tourism B.C. to drive that summer tourism traffic all across our province. I can tell you it paid off big time. And we're already starting to work with the UBCM to build opportunities like Picture B.C.

The \$1.5-million grant from the province to the UBCM is part of a much bigger tourism strategy. We're going to expand on those marketing initiatives. In the next few weeks we'll be building on existing tourism travel routes with nine new circle routes in each and every region of this province to draw visitors around the regions. In November we will watch new campaigns to boost winter tourism this year.

But we're going to do more. Three years ago I set a goal. I said to the tourism industry we need you to double the revenues that you generate within a decade. Candidly I didn't count on SARS; I didn't count on 9/11; I didn't count on some of the global challenges that we faced. But these two events may have dealt a devastating blow in the short term. They made us recognize what the opportunities were for the long term.

Despite those setbacks, tourism remains one of our strongest strategic building blocks as we move to the future. We do have the world's most spectacular parks, the most diverse cultures and landscapes and the most amazing resources.

Working with your communities under the recently defined agreement with the UBCM, our B.C. resort strategy will yield enormous dividends to people in every part of our province. Today, B.C.'s 700 resorts employ 26,000 people. We're going to build on that foundation with over \$1.2 billion of private sector investments to expand existing resorts and open new resorts over the next five years.

I'm going to make sure that we get our message out, that we tell the world, that we tell the country and that we tell the continent that this is the place we want them to visit. We're proud of British Columbia and all that it has to offer.

To that end, we are going to double Tourism B.C.'s marketing budget from \$25 million to \$50 million in British Columbia. We will work with the industry to ensure that we provide that funding in the most sensible way so that we can move to the possibility of doubling the industry by 2015.

I want you to be able to tell your stories. I want you to be able to show off your communities wherever you live in the province. The province will make a one-time grant of \$25 million to the UBCM to allow you to tell your stories of tourism across B.C.

I want you to understand this is going to be your money. You can use it how you see fit, whether it's for marketing or building products or connecting with other people.

With those two decisions, I believe that we will make British Columbia tourism a powerhouse, and you will see benefits in every region of our great province.

We want to create gateways to British Columbia that showcase all of our products and our materials and our opportunities. We want to do that in Sparwood, in Valemount, in Prince Rupert. We want to build on the leadership that we've seen from the community of Golden. There is no part of the province that we don't want to celebrate British Columbia in. Our gateway projects working with you will make a huge difference.

We were incredibly successful in 2003 when, because of your support, we got the opportunity to host the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. B.C. has to get ready to welcome the world. With your help, we'll do just that.

There will be \$510 million in Olympic venue construction. That's a start. We want to build on that foundation to secure lasting benefits in our economy in every region of our province.

In the weeks ahead you're going to hear much more about our specific plans for Olympic live sites. You know that it's a \$40-million project that is shared \$20 million-\$20 million between the federal and the provincial government. We want to get on with it. In November Minister Les and myself will bring together 100 or so Spirit of 2010 committees for a meeting to outline our Olympic Live centre program. We will also make sure that each municipality and local government in the province gets a full briefing on how that Olympic Live program will work.

I also want to outline a complementary initiative that will enable us to bring even more of your proposals to life.

I can tell you that two years ago when I announced Olympic Live in Whistler, it was a \$40-million program. I've had about \$400 million of ideas generated by you, in local government. We don't have that much, but we do have a way that we can springboard opportunities for each of you, and we intend to do that.

We also intend to establish training facilities in regional centres across the province that will meet the needs of athletes, for British Columbia and for Canada.

You know, Canada is the only country that's ever hosted an Olympics that hasn't won a gold medal when they were hosting. In 2010, the Olympics are coming back to Canada. Canadians are winning gold, and there's going to be lots of British Columbians amongst those gold-medal winners.

You know, a strong economy is not an end in itself; it's a means to an end. Is there more we can do to help provide for people that are in need? Absolutely. And now we are in a better fiscal position to do just that.

We need to improve shelter options for people who need safe housing. We need to improve drug and alcohol treatment programs to help those who want to break out of the cycle of dependency and dysfunction and despair that addictions create. In the months ahead you will hear much more about we intend to do that.

I'm asking Mayors Campbell, Lowe, Kinsley, Gray and McCallum to work with Ministers Locke, Brice, Coell and me to establish a framework for an integrated, comprehensive program to tackle the challenges of mental illness, homelessness, and addictions in our communities.

This is a great province. We can care for those in need and make our streets feel safer. People need clean, safe rooms. They need treatment for illness. They need counselling and support. They need training. They need jobs. To have all those things, we need a strong economy.

As we build prosperity for all British Columbians, all of these initiatives create a sense of optimism and hope for the people that live here.

If you look at our health care challenges that we face, we've made major strides in the last few years. British Columbia is the most popular place for doctors to practice medicine, and we're seeing more specialists in rural communities. We're seeing more general practitioners in town after town. And we're continuing to build on those programs.

We now have a stable funding formula that allows us to focus on providing care for people where they live.

One of my favourite events of the last summer was not, as you might expect, the Athens Olympics; it was going to the University of Northern British Columbia and inaugurating the first-ever medical school for doctors in rural and remote British Columbia. We said we'd do that, and we did - because of the leadership of the Minister of Advanced Education and Charles Jago, the president of the University of Northern British Columbia.

And now we're opening a new medical school at the University of Victoria.

We're almost doubling the number of doctors because doctors are the cornerstone of health care, for people.

And if you want to have a good time, you should have been with me in Kamloops on Wednesday morning when we announced British Columbia's newest university, Thompson Rivers University - for the entire Cariboo Chilcotin and Thompson watershed.

There are 25,000 new advanced education spaces being added across this province in college after college, and university after university, because education opens the doors of opportunity. And when we open the doors of opportunity, we want British Columbians to walk through and build their own dreams and realize their own hopes. That's what education can do.

You know, this is a great organization. You're great because you think of what you can do. You're great because you think of what your communities can be. You look to the future, and you plan a course to get yourself there.

Well, I can tell you, standing here today, the future is looking a whole lot better, and there is cause for hope in British Columbia. Our economy is on the rise; our fiscal house is in order; our health care system is on the mend; our education system is about to benefit from the largest expansion of advanced education spaces in 40 years. This is the province of British Columbia.

From Fernie to Fort Nelson, from Atlin to Osoyoos, from Saanich to Port Hardy - this is your province in the making. You at the UBCM are the leaders who have taken us forward. You at the UBCM are the people that will make sure that dreams in your communities come true.

Together, I know that we can do better for B.C.'s families. Working together, there is no question in my mind that we will realize the full potential of this great province, British Columbia, the best place on earth.

Thank you very much.