

Premier Gordon Campbell
Speech to Okanagan Mainline Municipal Association
May 7, 2004

Check Against Delivery

Let me start by saying I do appreciate the work that all of you have done over the last year. I know what challenges you face and I know how difficult it can be.

And one of the things that's most important for us: the open exchange of ideas, both at times when you agree and at times when you disagree, is very important to us in government. If you don't talk to us, if you don't explain what your position is, if you don't explain where you're going, it's very difficult for us to try and help.

It's great to be back in Kamloops. You know, I had a number of visits in Kamloops last year that weren't planned and, frankly, I would have rather not have been here for the challenges we were facing last year.

But there was one thing that underlined all those challenges that we faced last year, and that was the strength and resilience of the people that lived through those challenges. It was their ability to bring people together to meet common needs and common challenges.

Let me just give you one example. The first time I came here during the fires was in August, and I had the chance to go and fly over the fire in Kamloops. For those who have never seen a forest fire, it's an awesome sight. Those fires were far more enormous than you could ever imagine.

The day I flew over was when we had a bunch of reports about Barriere saying it had been consumed in flames. And Barriere hadn't been consumed in flames. Part of Barriere had been consumed in flames. But we flew around and we came down to Barriere. Actually, I was quite surprised to see the vast majority of homes in Barriere were there – thanks to the people who had risked their lives to protect Barriere.

But I knew how anxious people from Barriere were and I went to an evacuation centre. I went there, and people were sitting at the table finding out when they could go back home. There were two people talking to the person on the other side of the table. I went up to them and I said, "I know how difficult this is, and I want you to know that we're going to try and be there for you as we go through this. It's going to be tough, but we're going to be there for you." This one woman looked at me and said: "So tell me this: are you coming to the fall fair?" Now, that is resilience.

It's interesting how people react when people go through something like that. For those of us who weren't touched by those fires, it's sometimes difficult to think about what it would actually feel like, not what it sounds like or what it looks like on a piece of paper, but what it feels like to have the emergency response people tell you: "We're not quite

sure whether you're going to have to evacuate or not, but you better get ready; get all your stuff ready.”

There's one story that was pretty incredible. A couple was told that they've got to get ready and get prepared. So they're all prepared, and they get the knock on the door from the RCMP, and they say: “Sorry, you've got to leave.” So the wife starts putting boxes in the back seat, and the husband's a little bit late. He finally gets to the car, and he's got his snowmobile helmet. He puts it in the back. His wife looks and says: “What are you doing?” And he looks at her and says: "Oh, my God."

He gets out of the car, runs back into the house, and he's gone for five minutes, ten minutes, and 15 minutes later he's finally back in the car. He's got his snowmobile outfit on and he says: "Fine. I'm ready to go now. Let's go."

You know, when you think about what people went through and how much worse the outcome could have been, it's amazing how well it turned out. I do think meeting those challenges is a real problem not just for public service but also for local public servants across the province, for emergency response teams across the province, for regional employees across the province. I know a lot of that comes from your local leadership, and I want to say thank you to all of you for that leadership.

It was the second-largest evacuation in the history of our country, and we didn't lose one life. That's a real compliment to local government, to regional government, and to the people who worked for all of us. I want to say thank you to everybody.

I know your conference today is called: the next 25 years - moving forward.

Over the last few weeks I've been in 25 or 30 communities across the province, and there is a new sense of optimism in the province. There are some communities that look back and say to themselves: why can't it be like it used to be? But there are even more communities that are now looking forward.

We're standing in a region where the economy has picked up, where there's increasing excitement about the future. The Thompson-Okanagan region of the province, is in fact leading the province in a whole series of ways.

The critical component of this is for you to establish where you want to go in your community and in your part of the province. We have with us today a number of MLAs. I can just say to you that Kevin Krueger and Claude Richmond who are the MLAs here for Kamloops have worked tirelessly, not just on behalf of the hospital, not just on behalf of the North Thompson, not just on behalf of the educational opportunities that were needed here. They've looked very hard at how they can make sure that we have a strong climate for forestry, for mining, for energy development, for tourism development, for transportation development. The reason they can do that is because your local leadership has a clear sense of where they want to go and what they want to do.

I think that as you look at what's taking place, it's not hard to tell why people are feeling a little better. In Kamloops 91 per cent of the residents here say their quality of life is improving; 79 per cent said the economy is one of the major reasons for that.

It's nice to have children thinking that they can build their future here. One of the things we found in this region particularly is that local government leaders, chambers of commerce, community leaders were telling us quite clearly that one of the major challenges they faced was their education infrastructure. How do we make sure that the children, the young people that live here, can start thinking about their future here? As one person said to me from one community, "It's not quite fair to take our resources – you take our kids, and you wonder how we're going to build a future."

One of things that we wanted to do was we wanted to make sure that we weren't, in fact, taking kids from this region. So one of the major initiatives that we've undertaken is a major advanced education initiative. It's one that I think will have enormous benefits over the long term.

You know that there's now going to be a new University of British Columbia Okanagan campus in Kelowna. That will, over the next six years, generate \$75 million annually in research in the Okanagan-Thompson region. It will be able to complement already existing research facilities in the region, and things like UBC's wine institute will be able to come up here.

When you think 25 years ahead, sometimes it's good to think of how much progress you've made in the last 25 years. Twenty-five years ago there weren't a lot of people that would want to brag about the fact that they had only B.C. wines in their wine cellars. Today our wines are winning global competitions consistently, and all sorts of people are watching as our wine industry is growing and developing and, in fact, it's becoming the standard, it's becoming a global standard for the world in terms of its quality, in terms of its delivery. That's because in this region people said wine was one of the things that they wanted to pursue. We created a framework to allow them to do that.

One of the things that we want to do with our universities is make sure we're complementing those activities that are taking place here. So what we did with the UBC campus in the Okanagan was we said we wanted it to be a research facility. We wanted it to be comprehensive. I think it's going to be a huge asset and benefit to the entire region. In fact, the economic spinoffs are anticipated to be on the order of \$500 million a year for this region.

Why did it happen? It didn't really happen because of the province. It happened because of you. It happened because of your vision. It happened because of what you wanted to have happen.

I met with the mayors in the communities prior to making this announcement. One thing they said was they were concerned that at some of the college facilities the lights were going dim. We wanted to relight the lights. So by establishing a UBC-Okanagan campus,

in Kelowna, we were also able to re-establish Okanagan College as a major training facility, across the region. We're going to be opening those facilities up again. We're going to be providing more opportunities for young people and older people to get the training they need and we're going to be able to reduce the tuitions for Okanagan College by \$1,000 a student starting in September.

A few weeks ago I was here in Kamloops, and again, the people in Kamloops said that they wanted to see their university college more forward and become a university. So what we did was we worked with them, we looked at their strategy and their plans. The new university in Kamloops will be up and running by next year at this time. It will take advantage of the benefits that University College of the Cariboo provided and it will build on those. There will be a new campus that will be opening up in Williams Lake. We're taking the Open Learning institute and we're bringing it here to Kamloops where it will become the centre of distance learning. There will be approximately 3,000 additional spaces.

When you take the changes to the University of British Columbia in Kelowna, the new Okanagan College initiatives and the new university in Kamloops this year, we're going to be providing spaces for 8,000 young people right here in your region of the province.

We did that because it was important for young people to know they can build their futures in this part of the province. So while you face many challenges here and we face many challenges in the province, we should remember that your economy has actually been the fastest growing economy in our province over the last couple of years. That's again because of the leadership that you've shown.

Last year I came and I talked with you about opportunities that the Olympics present. We just held a meeting at the beginning of this week with regard to the spirit of 2010 and what those opportunities present. They present opportunities for everything from toques to chairs. It's an opportunity for us to show off the province and all of the natural resources we have. Remember, the government doesn't run the Olympics. But we do have an opportunity to springboard to new opportunities. We have a goal. When people leave the Olympics from Vancouver in 2010, we want them to have one word in their heads. You know what it is? Wood. We want people to think wood. We want to show them our major natural resource, our forest industry. We want to show it off in the convention centre that's being built. We want to show it off in the venues. We want to show it off in the podiums. We want to show it off in every way that we can think of as we bring the world to British Columbia, because we know this is an opportunity to build our forest industry.

We're building our markets in China now. We're building our markets in India now. We're fighting for our markets in the United States. But we know over the next ten years we can expand our marketplace. As we become even more competitive that will create more jobs and more opportunities throughout the province of British Columbia.

I think that's a critical component of building a long-term future. If we can get our resource economy back on its feet it will make an enormous difference to people and their sense of stability in their lives.

Through the nineties, one out of two people in the mining industry lost their jobs. We know that one of the things about mining is that over time mining slows down, so we have to keep on bringing new mines on stream to maintain that job growth. Well, over the last few years we've doubled the amount of exploration that's taking place in mining. If you have double the exploration there's more chance you're going to be able to open economically viable mining occupations in the province. As we do that, that creates that economic engine for moving forward.

In energy we have the same thing. Coalbed methane, coal, natural gas, offshore oil and gas - all of those things provide us a huge opportunity.

So what we're trying to do is to try and make sure we get our economy firing on all cylinders so that we can have the resources we need for excellent education facilities, like the University of Kamloops, like the university that will be opening in the Okanagan, and like Okanagan College. And so that we can have the resources we need for other vital public infrastructure.

I know Kevin Falcon, the Minister of Transportation, spoke with you yesterday about the \$1.3 billion in transportation investments that we have outlined as we move forward. The top priority that we have is to open up our gateway to Canada. That means the Kicking Horse Canyon, a \$670-million project that we'll do in partnership with Canada, which will bring people back to British Columbia.

As we look at that future, I think that we actually miss a huge opportunity if we don't look at the opportunity presented by 2010. The Olympics is not just about athletics. The Olympics is about opening up our province up to the world again.

You know, every single one of us has some special things that they can offer the world. We said at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities that we want to be sure we can show off the province in its best light to the world.

Let me put this in context for you. The opening of the Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002 had a viewership of two billion people - two billion. For 18 days the eye of the world is going to be on British Columbia. What we want to be able to do is show off the whole province of the world.

So I hope you're all going to help. What are the things that you want to offer to the world? What are the qualities and characteristics about your region of the province that you want to make sure the world knows?

We've also said, as we look toward the Spirit of 2010, that we have to recognize that tourism is going to benefit us enormously. There's no part of the province that's going to benefit as much as you have.

Twenty-five years ago there was no Sun Peaks. There was a Todd Mountain. But Todd Mountain was no Sun Peaks. Sun Peaks is now one of the largest employers in the Kamloops region. Sun Peaks has created enormous opportunities here. There were 304,000 visitors to Sun Peaks last year. With the new changes we're making in the airport, I think there's even more opportunity for those visitors to increase.

If you go to Big White, they're going to be investing \$128 million over the next year alone to build on that resort. If you look at Mount McKenzie and Revelstoke, that's \$270-million project. If you look at Kicking Horse resort, that's almost a \$400-million project. If you look at Mount Baldy in Osoyoos, that's a \$30-million planned investment, 500 construction jobs and 100 permanent jobs. If you look at Six Mile Ranch just down the road, Six Mile Ranch is going to be a \$180-million golf resort.

There are enormous opportunities that are already being generated here around the spirit of 2010. The spirit of 2010 is really for all of us to say: what is missing that's important to us? What is it that we should be investing in? What is it that allows us to drive forward and keep building the future that we want in this province?

The challenge, I think, of the spirit of 2010 is to look at the world as it's going to be, instead of seeing the world as it was. You know, we have asked the UBCM to help us with that, because it's by looking at the world from the local levels and seeing what you want your city or your community to look like over the next the years that's going to make a real difference.

There are things that we know today that, frankly, we just haven't been real willing to deal with. Here's the first thing that we know for certain. Our province is getting older. We're aging. Look at the person next to you and tell me they don't look a little older this year than they did last year. We're getting older. We have to think about how we're going to deal with that aging population.

I was in Creston the other day, where they've been saying to the province: we really need more dollars for our library. We want to try and use our library for a administering an outreach program. We think there's things we can do with our library to make sure that our seniors have more opportunities for learning as well as for reading and recreation. We really want some more dollars for our library.

I was feeling pretty good because we were going to try to get them those dollars for their library. I was going to meet with them at a local bakery to talk with all the library volunteers about what they've done and what they were doing and what we could do to help them.

There were two women who were older than me, sitting on a bench in front of the library. I came up to them. I thought to myself: these are probably two of the library volunteers. So I walked over to them and I said hi and it's great to be here in Creston. They said: "Well, you know, we want something from you." And I said, "I know, and we're going to do the library. It's really going to be great. We're going to do the library." They said: "No. We know all about the library. That's good you're doing that. We want a new aquatic centre." This is what was interesting about it: they said we need a new aquatic centre for their seniors. You're thinking 25 years ahead. Just think 25 years back from this. I can tell you if I'd been present 25 years ago when they said a new aquatic centre, you know what they would have said? We need a new aquatic centre for our kids.

We have to start thinking about how we do those things differently. When we design neighbourhoods, when we think of what our communities look like, when we think of what the housing in our communities looks like. What about seniors? You know, my mom is a senior. My mom decided she was going to leave her home. There was no place in her community that she could move to. She had to move to another community. It's a totally different community. We didn't think about how we could take care of her as she moved from a single-family home to a more compact residence. We didn't think very much about how you provide continuing care for people from their homes through what may be institutional care. We haven't challenged ourselves to do that.

I do think we know this: if we keep doing everything in exactly the same way there's not much chance we're going to get different results. We've asked the UBCM to help us with that, and we asked the UBCM because we think you know. We think you live it. We think it happens in your communities. We think you see the challenge. So you need to try and help us as we look at how we as a society, as a whole province, can start to deal with those challenges.

But in spite of those challenges we still do live in the best province in the best country in the world. It's a place where, if we are willing to open up to one another, if we are willing to challenge ourselves, if we are willing to think of the great strengths we have in British Columbia, there isn't anything that we can't accomplish.

You know, when I think about the Olympics, one of the great opportunities I've had is to meet a lot of great Olympic athletes. One of the athletes I've met is Simon Whitfield. Simon Whitfield broke both of his wrists and his collarbone in a competition just months before the 2000 Olympics - both of his wrists and his collarbone. But that summer he came back and he won a gold medal for Canada in Sydney. When he was asked what makes him so successful he said: true self-belief and a very vivid vision of success.

So what I ask you to do is to create a very vivid vision of your success. What would that success look like? How do people in your communities feel? What are the opportunities we will create for young people?

This is my vision. I'd like your community, whether you're a large community like Kamloops or a small community like Barriere, I'd like your community to think about

what you have. I'd like us to understand to achieve that gold medal I'm sure it took Simon Whitfield an awful lot of work. I bet there were days when he was training when he was thinking to himself: what on earth am I doing?

What we're saying in British Columbia is we're trying to create the future for young British Columbians that is second to none, a future that provides educational opportunities that are second to none, a future that provides economic opportunities that are second to none, a future that recognizes we inherited a great province from our parents. Previous generations of British Columbians worked hard, went through a lot of challenges to deliver each of us an acceptable place to live. Our challenge is to work hard to deliver the next generation of British Columbians a province that's in even better shape, even more prosperous and with more growth opportunities than the ones we inherited.

I know because of the work that each of you as local governments, I know because of your local commitments and your local leadership, we'll succeed in reaching that goal. Thank you very much.