

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Toronto
October 18, 2001

Check Against Delivery

I was grateful to be invited to this conference because its theme is one I have been very enthusiastic about for a number of years.

One of the challenges we face is remembering we're all elected to serve the same people. Part of the challenge is to get outside the box that contains and constrains us. Institutional boxes have held us back from dealing with what our citizens want, which is – I believe – the most cost-effective, results-oriented services we can deliver them for the dollars we take out of their pockets.

There is no such thing as municipal dollars, and there's no such thing as provincial dollars, and there's no such thing as federal dollars: there's just tax dollars we're taking from folks, and our job is to deliver services for them as best as we can.

When our country was formed back in 1867, municipalities weren't too important. Only about three per cent of people lived in Canada's cities. When British Columbia came into confederation in 1871, the population of our whole province – whose landmass is larger than England, France and Germany combined – was 36,000 people. When the constitution was put together, municipalities were important: they were part of the delivery mechanism. But they fit in right between mental institutions and public houses.

The country was put together as an inverted pyramid. We've got a federal government up here, a provincial government below it and municipal services down at the bottom. As I've said now for over a decade, we are taking that pyramid and turning it upside down so there are municipal opportunities to make local decisions on the ground floor, where they are most sensibly made.

Municipalities all have to balance their budgets: I think that's a great discipline. Other levels of government have also passed legislation that require balanced budgets. One of them is ours.

To balance a budget, you have to understand you can't do everything all at once just because you want to. You have to have resources that allow you to provide services in a cost-effective and sensible way. I believed this when I was a local councillor; I believed this when I was mayor of Vancouver.

Municipal or local government is triple-A government: It's the most accessible government, it's the most accountable government and it's the most affordable government. When we have a tool like that, why don't we take advantage of it and start

moving it forward so we start delivering services for the 21st century as opposed to services for the 19th century?

That's motivated a lot of what we've tried to do in British Columbia over the last four months. I want to talk about that because in spite of the fact that many things remain the same, a lot has changed in the last little while.

One of the things that we saw out of the events of September 11th was how important strength of community is. People shared with one another as they complemented services. In the city of New York, in communities across the country, it is the strength of community that is going to build the foundation for a brighter future.

When we think about building a Community Charter as we've talked about in British Columbia, the driving force behind that legislative change is to establish in our local communities the ability to make the decisions they need to make. It's to provide them with the resources they need to make those decisions so that the people who live there feel a strengthening of their sense of community and an increase in the quality of services.

Each of you knows there's really not much new about this discussion and this debate. A long time ago, I was an executive assistant to a mayor of Vancouver named Art Phillips. In 1994, Art Phillips gave an extremely eloquent address called Who Should Run Our Cities. He said it was a good idea for cities to be able to run themselves.

It was probably one of the best speeches he ever gave, and the fact that I wrote it has nothing to do with my analysis of it. But the issues remain the same: How do we provide all of you at the local level with the tools to meet the needs of communities with differing and diverse concerns and objectives, in a way that maintains the framework we've established provincially or federally?

The challenge is going to be a significant one. Let me talk to you about some of the things I face today. We decided we were going to do a Community Charter when I was in Opposition. It would empower communities to make their own decisions. It would prohibit what we call "downloading" in British Columbia

Does everyone know what downloading is?

Let me tell you a quick story. In 1991, when I was mayor of Vancouver, we were developing what we called the Local Government Bill of Rights to take to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. We had a lot of talk about downloading, and we did focus groups to find out if they understood the issues.

At one point, the person facilitating a focus group said, "We have to stop the downloading." Then the facilitator said to the group, "Do you know what that is?" They had blank looks on their face. One fellow said, "I know what that is – that's like when you take something from your computer and you put it onto a disc." Another said, "No,

no, no – downloading is when there’s not enough snow on the mountain so you get on the chair lift and you get carried down to the bottom of the mountain.”

So while we know what downloading is, I think we should recognize that our citizens don’t necessarily know what downloading is.

In my mind, downloading is a misallocation of resources for the responsibilities we’ve given you. It happens when provincial jurisdictions make a decision that has no basis in your plans for your community, and they impose a cost on you, but don’t give you any resources that allow you to deliver that service in a thoughtful way.

One of the things our Community Charter will do is to outlaw downloading. It will not be possible for us to give unfunded mandates. It will not be possible for us to say, “You must do this to meet our goals.” What we will do is set some provincial frameworks and standards and goals. Then we will say to municipalities, “You tell us how you are going to meet them. You show us how you are going to meet them. It’s up to you.”

When I was in local politics, the province initiated a financial review. They thought a good way to do this would be to put the mayor of Vancouver – the largest community in British Columbia – in the same room as the mayor of Port McNeill, which is one of the smallest. They thought we would be at loggerheads and would fight the whole time.

You know what? We agreed. We both said we needed resources to meet our needs. The mayor of Port McNeill didn’t expect the resources we required in Vancouver, but he still had to have services. We both had to provide community services and facilities. We both had to provide policing. We both had to think about how we were going to make sure parks were available to our citizens. And we ended with a strong and sensible framework.

In British Columbia we have initiated the task of creating a Community Charter, which says clearly our citizens depend on cities to deliver services. If we allow local governments to solve the problems they face with the resources they need, and if we set clear and understandable provincial standards, we will have far more cost-effective government and far better services.

I’ve noticed there is a significant difference between being leader of the Opposition and being premier. When we put out the first draft of Community Charter in 1994, I was leader of the Opposition. We put together probably the most comprehensive piece of legislation developed by an Opposition in British Columbia for a long time.

We circulated it to every single local government in British Columbia, and we said to them, “Tell us what you think of this; tell us how we can make it work for you. Tell us how to draft this up, and we’ll draft it up. This is something we think is critical to delivering services.” We only got a few responses.

We're now government and we're saying we want to go forward with the Community Charter. Suddenly people are digging around in their filing cabinets to find out where that old Community Charter is.

When I talk about delivering a Community Charter, I'm talking about a true partnership working on behalf of our citizens. There are things I believe the province should do, and there is a provincial framework I want to establish. Having done that, though, I want to allow municipalities – whether they are in the Kootenays, the North or the Lower Mainland – to come up with solutions and move forward on their own.

If we recognize we're all trying to serve the same constituents, who have mutual goals and require mutual services, our task is not to say what's good for the province or what's good for the municipality – it's to say what's good for the citizen. What we haven't been able to do is get ourselves into the frame of mind that asks the question, "How do we deliver those services in the most cost-effective, accountable and open manner possible?" That's what our Community Charter is about.

We've now established a Community Charter Council, and I worked with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities on the appointments to it. One of my senior provincial public servants came to me and said he had a bit of a problem with the council I'd appointed. He said no one on it understands what the provincial framework is, or what the concerns might be.

As we build this partnership, it is important for us to understand what's happening provincially as well as what's happening locally. So I decided the council would create a framework so we could start to drive this Community Charter in a way that would make sure provincial objectives were met, as well as ensuring we were allowing activities to take place and decisions to be made at the local level.

Here's an example of the challenge we faced. If you're not thoughtful about how you set up the Community Charter, British Columbia could end up with 189 separate forest policies. We're not looking for that: the provincial government has a responsibility to establish those policies. We may want to ask municipalities for help in some areas, but that's our job, not the local government's job.

Today in Canada, health care is a provincial responsibility. We have to determine how we are going to deliver health care in a way that meets people's needs, whether they live in remote, rural communities or urban communities. We may well ask local governments for advice, but currently that is a provincial responsibility, and we want to make sure we are delivering that responsibility.

We are dealing with a whole range of transportation issues in British Columbia. Our party believes in regional transit authorities. But before the election, we had a provincial government imposing provincial goals on those authorities.

Making transportation decisions on the basis of what we feel is best for us provincially won't solve problems or create a transportation infrastructure that works. Transportation problems in the Lower Mainland are different than transportation problems in the Peace River. That's why we must have regional transportation authorities helping us solve those problems.

For example, building standards and designs must be dramatically different in the northeastern part of our province than the southwest. The northeastern part is part of the prairies. The southwestern part is mountainous; the Lower Mainland has a moderate climate. In northeastern British Columbia, it freezes before you know it, and it doesn't thaw until after you thought it possible to be that late. So if we try to deliver services centrally with one-size-fits-all solutions imposed on a province as large as ours, we're going to have a lot of difficulty.

One of the things the Community Charter is trying to do – and I don't think we should underestimate the difficulty of this task – is allocate responsibilities and resources so we are providing services to people in the most cost-effective and accountable way possible.

Some areas are going to be difficult to deal with, and I want to touch on this before I close. The most critical part of this is trust. I can tell you this without any fear of being contradicted: there will never be a premier in British Columbia as committed to this idea as I am. I know the problems the province has created, I know the challenges that you face locally, and I understand the changes that have to be made if we are going to deliver services for the 21st century.

I also understand that I don't know everything. We're going to have to work together to deliver a Community Charter that works to liberate communities to make their own decisions, that works to liberate communities so they have the resources to meet the needs of the people that live there, and that works to liberate communities so they can have a diverse response to a broad range of problems and challenges.

I believe we can do that. Towards the middle of January of next year, a draft Community Charter will be put in front of the legislature, and we're going to say to all of the MLAs, "Tell us what's working and what doesn't work. Tell us what we have to fix to meet the principles we've outlined in this bill."

Our goal is not to have a great big, fat Municipal Act. Our goal is to have a Community Charter that enables local governments to drive their own decisions. Our goal is to work together to serve the needs of our citizens. It is, I believe, a huge institutional change that will restructure how government works in our province. I sincerely hope that it's a huge success and that you will be able to pick up on the lessons we learned in British Columbia.

I have been committed for some time to bringing elected officials together – regardless of their party, regardless of their background – recognizing that elected people are all trying to serve the public good. In British Columbia, we have initiated something called the

Provincial Congress that will take place at the end of February of next year. At the Provincial Congress we'll bring together every MLA and federal MP, regardless of their party. We'll bring together the federal senators, the mayors of the 15 largest municipalities, the heads of all regional municipal associations and the president of the UBCM.

We're going to say, "This is what we're trying to accomplish as a province. Why don't we all sit down and discover what it is we share, and how we can work together to provide our citizens with the services they need in a thoughtful way. Let's put the wrangling behind us, and let's look to the future and see how we can act in a positive and progressive way to move forward and create the kind of environment and the kind of communities we need."

I think all of you in this room know that without the strength of our communities, we don't just lose our economic opportunities for the future – we lose the social cohesion that has made our country such a great place to live.

We are a country that celebrates diversity. We are a country that understands and recognizes the importance of opportunity. We are a cosmopolitan country that has a huge future ahead of us if we can put aside the institutional inertia that's held us back and be imaginative enough and creative enough to move forward.

Our Community Charter is meant to create a sense of opportunity for municipalities, a sense of liberating their imaginations so they can deliver to their citizens the best possible services. It's a huge challenge, it's one we embrace with excitement, and it's one I hope you'll be able to look back on 10 years from now and say, "They made the right choices in British Columbia for themselves, for their citizens and for the communities in which they all live."

Thank you very much.