

Premier Gordon Campbell
Speech at Rural Communities Summit, Clearwater
June 20, 2003

I want to start today by saying congratulations. This is the first time that rural communities have come together, and I think focusing on the issues that confront you as rural communities is something that's essential to all of us.

Thank you for coming from all over the province to share your experiences, ideas, hopes and solutions, because at the end of the day we are all confronted with the challenges of change.

We live in times of substantial and significant change. We're feeling them in the province, from the smaller towns and the larger cities. We're feeling them in our country, and we're feeling them around the world.

It's because people like you decide to come together and give up some of your time to look at the challenge that change presents to us, and to come forward with constructive and concrete solutions, that we will have an opportunity to move forward together.

There should be no illusions in any community anywhere in British Columbia: this is a resource province. Our traditional resources built the province in the past, and our traditional resources will be essential for building our province in the future.

I don't think there's ever been a political party in British Columbia that hasn't wanted a good forest industry, hasn't wanted a good mining industry, hasn't wanted to make sure that our agriculture industry was thriving, hasn't tried to provide the policy framework to ensure that our rural communities had strength and resilience and robustness as they look to the future.

I also think that we have to look at the policies that have been put in place and look at the actions that have been taken, and simply ask ourselves if we got the results that we wanted. Have we found that the province that we can leave to our children is in better shape than the province that we inherited from our parents?

If we haven't, let's try and ask ourselves how we can do better. It requires a lot of work, and sometimes it requires all of us to think in different ways than we have in the past.

I can tell you that our MLAs are dealing with these acts and with these issues all the time. I want to thank all the ones that have come today. They are all here to learn from you today. I can tell you they are working very hard to make sure, as we do deal with the changes that confront us, that we're reinforcing our strength and our values as British Columbians.

So let me talk quickly — at least, relatively quickly — about some of the big changes that we're facing. One of the changes is in all of us as individuals.

Take a moment to look at the person that's sitting next to you. Now, tell me: how many people looked across at the person next to them and thought to themselves: they're getting a lot younger?

The fact of the matter is we're all aging. Our society is changing, and it doesn't matter where we live in the province. In fact, the aging in British Columbia — as I think David Baxter mentioned this morning — is exacerbated in rural communities because a number of young people are leaving those communities.

The only group that does not reflect that is our aboriginal communities where there's an explosion of young people in aboriginal communities across the province. That's a plus for us because that gives us an opportunity to build a better future for all of us.

As we look at aging and we look at what's happening with people, there are two essential provincial services. One is health care. Health care costs are rising dramatically in part because we're getting a lot older.

We have to find ways to improve health care for people in small communities and large. We have to recognize, as we do that, that the most critical component of health care is people. It's the doctors and nurses, the physiotherapists, the health care professionals that are there in our health services for us when we need it.

Now, this is a story not about British Columbia; it's about my own experience in a very small town called Yola, in the northeastern State of Nigeria. My wife and I were there teaching in the seventies.

I had a motorcycle accident. You think our roads are bad here in British Columbia? Try driving the roads in Yola in 1970 — very bumpy roads.

My motorcycle slid out. I fell off and did the smart thing: fell on my head. I had a helmet so there was no damage. My wife fell on her shoulder and she got a big wound on the side of her arm.

We're now sitting in a very remote place, and we have to depend on the health care system then. I can tell you that was one time when the health care system in Canada really came alive for me. I can remember thinking to myself: should we fly home?

But we were fortunate because although our hospital was made of mud and plaster and was one level and was right on the ground, there were two western doctors there. Igor was the name of one of the doctors. He took my wife and did exactly what needed to be done, and I felt comfortable with that — because of the person, because I knew he was providing the care that she needed to make sure she got better.

One of our challenges as we look at the changes that we're confronting in British Columbia is how do we try and create a place where physicians want to practice in rural

and remote communities so we can deliver health care in a timely way where people live? Because we all know that if health care is not there then we start to undermine the quality of life for people that live in the province.

So we did a number of things. The first thing we did, for the first time in the history of this province, is that we decided to train doctors in rural and remote medicine. In 2003, there will be 24 spaces available at the University of Northern British Columbia that will be focusing on training in rural and remote medicine, and they will be graduating doctors.

One of the reasons that is important is that we know from talking to doctors that they actually practice where they train. They practice medicine when we give them the tools they need, and they want to practice medicine.

We also recognized that the number of nurses practicing in British Columbia was decreasing. It wasn't a surprise why. A lot of experts told previous governments that if you just would cut back on the number of nurses, somehow you'd cut back on the cost of health care. It doesn't work that way because we all demand health care when we need it.

So what we've done is that we have actually increased the number of nurse training positions in the province by over 1,800 positions. They're training in community colleges and at universities all over the province. In the last two years we've added 568 additional nurses to our provincial health care system so they can provide support.

As we provided those additional training stations, we said again: we would like to encourage you to practice in rural and remote British Columbia, and so we are providing any doctor or any nurse with a forgivable loan if they're willing to practice in rural and remote British Columbia.

We do that for a reason. We believe that when they practice there, with the supports we put in place, they'll stay there, they'll live there, and they'll be part of the community there. As we look to the future, we said: let's try and make sure that we can have a health care system that gives people the care where they need it.

We know that we've had to make changes as a result of that. One of them has been in telemedicine. There's a story of a young person in Williams Lake who broke their arm. Because of the digital technologies that are now available, they could take digital x-rays and flash it down to Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops within half an hour. Within two days that young person was in Kamloops, was taken care of and was on their way back to Williams Lake. Before that technology was available, it would have taken four days just to get the x-rays to Royal Inland.

We've added \$1.1 billion to the health care budget in the last two years. There's more money that's coming in the next two years, and we will still be rushing to catch up to catch up with the changes that are taking place.

Here's one change that we should all know. The average cost of health care for children from five to nine years old is \$800 a year. The average cost of health care for someone who's over 90 years old is \$20,800 a year. And guess what the fastest growing demographic cohort is in the province of British Columbia? Ninety-plus.

I'll tell you; I want that to continue happening. I'm looking forward to being 90-plus. I want my mother to be 90-plus. I know you want your families to have healthy, robust lives when they're older.

But as we do that, we have to look at those changes and deal with it. To provide the support for that, we have to have an economy that's working and an economy that's sustainable.

For that to happen, we need resource industries that are flourishing. The forest industry, the mining industry, the agriculture industry, the tourism industry — those industries are the critical cornerstones of our future.

Yes, we want other things to take place. Yes, we want a growing technology industry. Yes, we want to see more activity taking place in film. But if we don't have a robust resource economy in this province, we're going to watch as our quality of life changes. We have to make our industries more competitive.

In forestry, from 1997 to today, we lost 16,000 jobs in the province. Of course, we have to change that. Was there anyone in this room that wanted to watch as 27 mills closed down permanently in the last five or six years? I don't think so.

We've gone through very difficult times in this region. Weyerhaeuser closed its mill at Vavenby and 180 people lost work. That has an enormous impact on people here. Fortunately, last week, we had Interact Wood Products saying they're coming back. Eighty of those people will have work starting this fall.

Each of you has felt the impacts of the softwood lumber challenges that we face with the United States. Is there anyone here that doesn't think that's an enormous impact on our economy across the province? Whether you're a small, one-mill town or whether you're the largest community in British Columbia, that softwood lumber dispute has already cost hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars, and that creates uncertainty.

A short-term, quick-fix solution is not going to solve our problems, because that's what we've had in the past, and it doesn't work. What we have to do is try and put in place an agreement that works in the long term for everyone in the province. If we do that, we'll get the investment we need and we'll allow for the entrepreneurial activity to take place that is so essential.

But there's another thing that the softwood lumber agreement should remind us all: we can't be as dependent on the American marketplace as we've been in the past. We have to expand our markets. We have to think outside our traditional boundaries.

One of the things that we've done with industry is we're investing \$20 million in marketing B.C. products around the world.

There's a \$12 million public-private partnership that's actually marketing British Columbia homes in the Chinese market. The fastest growing economy in the world is in China. Why shouldn't British Columbia — with the best workers, with the best product in the world — go to that marketplace and say: we can solve your problems for you; we can show you how you can benefit from B.C. wood products. We can teach them the building codes. We can show them how they can use wood products to meet their needs. That's what we're going to try and do.

You know, it takes some time. It took us about ten years before British Columbia was the number one supplier to the Japanese market. It's going to take us some time before we're the number one supplier to the Chinese market. But I can tell you this: we will never be number one if we don't roll up our sleeves and go to work on this. And I want you to know we're rolling up our sleeves, we're going to work on it, and we're going to be the number one supplier for the Chinese market.

The energy industry in British Columbia is growing by leaps and bounds. The number of wells that have been drilled in this province has increased by 50 per cent. That's our traditional energy sector up in the Peace River.

Regardless of what region you live coal-bed methane is an enormous opportunity for British Columbia: 90 trillion cubic feet of coal-bed methane is waiting throughout this province. It creates opportunity for employment, for investment in every part of British Columbia.

Dick Neufeld and Stan Hagen are now down in the United States, and they're finding, from their experience, what we need to do to make sure that we maximize the benefit of that.

Offshore oil and gas is something that will impact everyone up and down the coastal part of British Columbia. If we can do it environmentally soundly, if we can do it in a scientifically secure way, it will have a huge benefit to First Nations communities and coastal communities throughout our province.

If we can create the right environment, we believe that over the next five years we can create \$20 billion of investment in B.C.'s energy sector and that creates literally thousands of jobs. Those jobs, nine times out of ten, are going to be in the heartlands of our province. They're going to be in the Kootenays and the Chilcotin. They're going to be in the Northwest and the Peace. They're going to be on the coast. They're going to be in the Cariboo.

Twenty years ago, mining was the number two industry in our province. But one out of two people in the mining industry have lost their jobs in the last decade. We still have

exceptional mineral resources here in British Columbia. And over the last two years as the amount of exploration has almost doubled, but we have to double it again, in the next two years, to get back to a sustainable level of mining activity in the province.

Clearly, as we look at our resource communities — whether it's forestry or energy, whether it's agriculture, whether it's mining — it's important for us to know that you need to have the right public infrastructure to support it.

I've mentioned health care. We do have to find ways that we're delivering health care, more successfully, over the long-term, to people throughout the province.

We also have to do that with transportation. Whether you're in the forest industry or the mining industry or the energy industry or the agriculture industry, you're using roads, and we have to be sure that those roads are safe and secure. That's why we have decided to invest \$609 million in rural and resource roads, to help expand our economic opportunities.

We're also working to create new tourism opportunities. We just announced today \$242,000 to fund a tourism information centre at Cache Creek. That's one of 147 projects that we've announced, as part of the Canada–British Columbia infrastructure program.

It's critical for us to make sure that we are husbanding all of the resources — the federal resources, the provincial resources, as well as local resources — to reinforce your objectives and your goals.

For us to move forward as a province, we also have to recognize how important our educational institutions are — not just K-to-12, but our colleges, our university colleges and our universities.

We have already launched regional innovation research chairs. Those regional innovation chairs are for people in the college community to say: what are the things that we have to pursue in our part of the province? It's critical that you seize those opportunities because it's by the development of that research that we will be able to maximize the potential of each place in British Columbia.

It is different living in Smithers than it is in Vancouver. It is different living in Kelowna than it is in Cranbrook. It is different living in Golden than it is in Kamloops. We know that.

But you know one thing that isn't different? It's British Columbians' sense of their future, British Columbians' ability to roll up their sleeves and do what they know is right to build a stronger and better future for the people that follow them. Our parents all did that. We inherited that sense from our parents.

We can now do that. We can give the next generation of British Columbians a greater sense of hope and opportunity if we're willing to look at the facts; if we're willing to work

with one another; if we're willing to talk directly about both the challenges we face, the agreements we have, and the disagreements we have, in a way that's open and in a way that recognizes that we share that value of making this a better province for everyone.

Let me close by talking a bit about a great opportunity that could come our way in about 13 days from now. In 13 days I'll be in Prague where they'll be deciding whether or not they're going to award British Columbia the 2010 Olympics and Paralympic Games.

I hope they do because as I've traveled the province, regardless of the region, regardless of the size of the town, people are excited about the opportunities the Olympics can present.

They're excited in the Kootenays where one small company saw an opportunity, in 2002. They saw an opportunity to knit sweaters for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, in Salt Lake City. And the Kootenay Knitting Company got the contract and they increased their number of employees by five times in the last year because they took that opportunity.

In 100 Mile House, Sitka Log Homes decided they were going to take an opportunity out of the 2002 Olympic Games. They did three major facilities in Salt Lake City. As a result, they are run off their feet, in spite of the rising Canadian dollar, because they are providing people with a valuable product. They're providing people with the best that British Columbia has to offer.

Each of you in your communities know there's something that you do in your community that's the best that British Columbia has to offer. Each of you knows that there are some ideas that you can pursue that will be the best that our province has to offer.

The Olympics in 2010 gives us an opportunity to focus on the best in British Columbia because, in spite of the problems that we face and the challenges that we confront together, I know this: there isn't a better place to live than here. There isn't any other place that provides people with the kind of opportunities to make changes that you want, in a positive and constructive way, for the next generation of British Columbians.

I want to thank you for being here today. I want to thank you for the energy, the time, the effort, the ideas, the commitment and the drive that you have for your province. And I want to tell you this: our government's here to take your direction. We need your ideas and we want your help.