

Premier Gordon Campbell
Address to the Union of B.C. Municipalities
September 26, 2003

Check Against Delivery

It is truly great to come to UBCM convention each year.

It's amazing when you think that this is the hundredth meeting of the UBCM – 100 meetings since 1905. In 1905, George Ferguson wasn't the Mayor of Abbotsford, that's how long ago it was. There were 250,000 people living in this great province in 1905 and there were 22 municipalities. Today there are 4.2 million people living in 155 municipalities and 27 regional districts.

With all the people we have and all the institutional changes that we've had, there are two things that remain constant: this is a province with exceptional challenges and enormous possibilities. We live in a great place, and I can tell you: as Premier of British Columbia I couldn't be prouder of British Columbians and more pleased to be representing our province. It is such an enormous privilege to do that.

Yesterday you had a visit from Paul Martin, and Mr. Martin said to you something that UBCM has been saying for a long time: we've got to change things. We have to change how our institutions work. We have to recognize that the changes that have taken place in the world require each of our public institutions to reflect those changes.

Yesterday Mr. Martin challenged you, and he challenged the rest of us. He challenged us to change.

There's two ways we can look at that challenge. We can either accept it or reject it.

I accept it. I welcome it – and I know, with you, we will make that change work for British Columbians and for Canadians as well.

As we look to our province, as we look to our country, one of the things that I believe we have to do is change our institutions so that they are in alignment with the quality of services and the kinds of services that people want.

Now, in 1905, I'm sure they had a number of new ideas. I can guarantee you that there were some people sitting in the back of the meeting, and they were saying: "This will never work. We can't do that. I can't believe we're creating this Union of B.C. Municipalities. What's that?"

Well, some people said the same thing to you about the Community Charter. As we have moved down that road, we've learned a lot. We may not have finished the journey, but we

have certainly started it, and we've got there because of your commitment and your perseverance.

On behalf of my colleagues, I want to say thank you to the UBCM for the work you've done on the Community Charter.

Just think of this: in 1905 there were approximately 900 people that lived in Kelowna; there's over a hundred thousand today. 7,000 people lived in Nanaimo — over 76,000 today. 2,200 in Kamloops; 81,000 today. The entire Lower Mainland — about 100,000 people; 2.4 million today.

Now, I'm sure at the inaugural meeting, they talked about the need for improved transportation. I haven't talked to any of you who doesn't think that's still a need.

I'm sure that at the inaugural meeting, they talked about the need for additional infrastructure resources. I know this: in 1905, almost for certain, they were saying they needed more money. Nothing's changed in that regard.

But you know, there is something that is even more important than that and that hasn't changed. You saw a little bit of it earlier today in the video. This is still a province of exceptional natural resources, and this is still a province where the most important natural resource we have is the people who live here.

I have always liked coming to this convention. I liked it when I was in opposition; I liked it when I was a mayor, and I like it now that I'm in government because this is where I hear from people. I hear about what you're trying to do, about what you're dreaming for your community, about what, if we work together, we can accomplish.

You talk to the folks at Tahsis, where their major industrial plant has closed down. They don't give up. They say: "Look at Tahsis, look at what we have. We're here on Nootka Sound. We can build a community here. We want to build a community here. Help us to build a community here."

I can tell the folks from Tahsis, this: we're going to help you build that community because you deserve it for the work that you do.

I was in Prince Rupert a few months ago. Prince Rupert has been hit and hit and hit again. They've been hit by the challenges in the fishery. They were hit by international challenges a few years ago. They've been hit by the challenges of the forest industry, by the challenges of Skeena-Cellulose.

But do they say: "Oh gee, we can't do anything." No. They say: "We're going to have a container facility in this point." They say: "We're going to drive goods to Asia and bring goods from Asia back to North America." They say: "We're going to complement our wild salmon industry with an aquaculture industry, that's scientifically sound and that

provides jobs for our people. We're going to become a transportation hub in Prince Rupert.”

I know they're going to succeed because they have vision and they know where they want to go. And we're going to help them get there.

You just have to have gone through the experience of the last summer — it has been a summer of enormous trials and some great triumphs as well — and you recognize that it is the spirit of British Columbians – the spirit of the people that live in your communities – that drives this province forward. It has in the past, and it's going to, in the future, again.

It's the spirit. It's the spirit of British Columbia that makes this the best province in the best country in the world.

Now, a couple of you have mentioned to me that maybe we haven't that good a few breaks over the last while. How can I feel lucky? We've had 9/11, and the war with Iraq, and the falling tourism market. We've had the softwood lumber dispute and the rising Canadian dollar. We've discovered a whole new set of initials since last year's convention here. How many people here had ever heard of SARS, last year? It wasn't even in our minds. And although we knew about BSE, we sure didn't think it was going to touch us. We've got drought in the south and floods in the north. The pine beetles are ravishing four million hectares of land throughout the north and the Interior, all the way down to the Kootenays. We've had the worst forest fire season in the history of the province.

How can I feel lucky? Well, when I went to Kamloops and met with people there in August, one of the things I did was I went to the evacuation centre. Those evacuation centres were incredible centres of love and support when. Volunteers from all over the community were there. People who'd been asked to leave their homes were there.

I went up to two women who were sitting there, and they were talking to the counsellor on the other side of the table. I just asked them; “How are you doing? I want you to know we're going to be there for you.” You know what these two women said? They'd left their homes. They'd left everything they could think of behind them, and the fire was going pretty strong that day. You know what they said to me? “Are you coming to the Barriere rodeo on September the first?” Now, that's British Columbia spirit.

Another story I heard: I think most of us can't begin to understand how difficult and emotionally challenging it is to go through an evacuation. In some cases, we gave evacuation alerts, and ten minutes later, people were told they had to leave. In other cases, we gave evacuation alerts, and it was a little longer.

In one situation, the alert had been given, and then the fire officials came and said: you've got to leave. So the woman rushed out of her house, and she had a box packed with the things she thought were really important. She'd obviously thought about it, and she

packed and put the box in the back of her car. She sat in the car. She was waiting for her husband.

He's gone five minutes, ten minutes. Finally, he comes out of the front door, and all he has in his hands is his snowmobile outfit. He sits down in the car, and she says to him: "Hon, what are you doing?" He looks down, and he sees he's got his snowmobile suit. "I don't know what I was thinking," he says. He leaves his snowmobile outfit in the back seat, and he walks back into the house. He's gone for five or ten minutes. He finally comes back out, and he sits in his car. "There," he says. He has his snowmobile outfit with him. That's the spirit of British Columbia, too.

You know, in this summer, everyone rose to the occasion: we've heard about that over the last few minutes. But let me just say that it's much bigger than we often think. The devastation is greater than we think. The emotional trauma is greater than we can ever reflect on the television screen or, even, on a large screen, like the one we've just seen.

But we should reflect on this in a way that remembers the incredible service we had from the people we ask to protect us: not just the firefighters who were superb, but the emergency officials, the Canadian armed forces.

Rich Coleman was on the phone with the Canadian armed forces virtually every day. No sooner had he asked, and within 24 hours there was a response. The response was never "maybe;" the response was always: "yes, we will be there." They did exceptional work on behalf of all of us in British Columbia.

We've had an incredible spirit of generosity that I have felt personally myself earlier this year. But I can tell you: it was reflected time and time and time again as we went through this summer.

The Chinese community in Vancouver raised \$250,000 for the North Thompson fire victims. Neil Macrae, one of the toughest, roughest, meanest, cruelest, most vicious sportscasters going, has got a golf tournament today with Tony Parsons which is going to raise over \$500,000 for the North Thompson victims.

Having said this, we've gone through a heck of a summer —there's no question about it — and we have to learn from it. And I want you to know that we are going to learn from it. I've initiated a review that will be completed by February fifteenth of next year. I want it to be complete February 15 so we can do what we need to do, based on what we learn from this experience, in time for the 2004 season.

I'll be providing detailed terms of reference, as well as the people who will be involved in that review, next week. But let me tell you this quickly: it will be independent, it will open and it will be thorough.

Obviously, when we go through something like this, we all have an obligation to learn. We need to determine what went well and what didn't go so well. We have to ask

ourselves openly and honestly what we could have done better: how we can improve our emergency responses, how we can better connect between our local governments and our local emergency people and First Nations communities. We have to be sure that wherever and whenever there's a disaster that strikes in British Columbia, we are prepared. To do that, we have to be prepared to learn.

We have to ask ourselves how we can help victims more quickly and how we can aid communities to get back on our feet. We have to do that in a way that, again, is open and accepting of constructive comment.

But I also think there's another thing we'll learn from this review. We'll learn how well you did. We'll learn how well British Columbians did.

Think of this just for a second: for the first time in the history of our province, we created a provincewide fire department. People from your communities, from 61 communities across this province, dedicated personnel and equipment to protect property of other British Columbians, and they did it without hesitation, and they did it with courage and commitment.

I cannot imagine what it must feel like to be one of the residents in a community that was touched by the fire. It was erratic; there was no reason behind it. There are subdivisions where one home is gone and 12 all around it are still standing. There are others where homes have been evaporated around one single structure that remains standing. The structure and the fabric of neighbourhoods was invaded by that fire.

As we look at this, we have to be willing to learn from it, to understand it and to recognize what happened. But we should know this: we lost 334 homes, and for every home we lost, ten were saved. Fifty thousand British Columbians — the second-largest evacuation in the history of this country — were evacuated from their homes. And 4.2 million British Columbians said: “how can we help?”

Those fires were rampaging. At one point, the Okanagan Mountain fire was travelling at 300 metres a minute. It's incredible to think of what we've been through, and it's incredible to think of what you've done.

I think each of us have an obligation to British Columbians to be sure we do all we can to make sure we learn from this, but the big lesson is this: British Columbians said we don't want to lose a life to fire.

Unfortunately, three people lost their lives in airplane and helicopter accidents while helping us fight those fires. Our hearts go out to those families. But of the public and the firefighters, we did not lose one person to the fires.

From the Kootenays, to the Okanagan, to McLure, to Barriere, to Pritchard, to Chase, to all the communities who were touched, let me say this: you handled yourself in an

exemplary manner. Your government's going to try to do the same thing as we review this and learn from it and build on it because that's what British Columbians deserve.

And you know, while we recognize what we've learned from that, I think the major thing we should learn is that when we come together, when we have a common goal and a common purpose, British Columbians are second to none.

We're going to need that spirit, and we're going to need that commitment because we've got a number of challenges ahead of us.

The fires are dramatic; the pine beetle is about that big. Now think of this: this year, alone, the pine beetle has consumed four times more forest than the fires throughout the province. The pine beetle has invaded our forests from the north, to the Kootenays. Four million hectares have been infested. That's an area over twice the size of Vancouver Island.

Though it's not as dramatic, it will be as devastating in the long term if we don't deal with it. We intend to.

Thirty communities are now at risk as a result of the pine beetle epidemic. Our chief forester has told us that for every infested tree that we remove, it will save 16 the following year. Thus far, our efforts have been concentrated on areas outside of our parks.

But I want to tell you another story: another example of local officials telling us what we need to do. In 1997, while I was in opposition, we did a tour across the north, that we called northern focus groups. Frank Reid, the Mayor of Vanderhoof, came to us and said: "We have a real problem brewing in Tweedsmuir Park. It's called the pine beetle; we have to deal with it; we can't wait for cold winters."

We've had a pine beetle task force that's moved forward. We've increased the AAC in the north, significantly, but there's more that we'll need to do.

We can no longer give the pine beetle free passes to our parks because I've noticed this about pine beetles: they don't care where a park boundary starts and doesn't. We have to deal with them there.

So I intend to establish a special symposium this fall in Quesnel. We're going to hear from local residents. We're going to hear from you as community leaders. We're going to hear from industry experts, and we're going to hear from forest managers, on what we have to do to protect our forest health and to restore it because only if we are willing to fix the problem, are we going to be able to protect our forest-dependent communities, that are going to be in danger if we don't. It's important that we do that, and it's important that you be there.

We will fix it because if we don't, there's too much damage in the future. After this summer of fires, there is no question that we need to look at our strategies for combating the pine beetle, and we will.

These natural challenges that we faced are very significant, and they've been exacerbated by the man-made challenges that, in many cases, we inherited. Two years ago we inherited a massive structural deficit, and it hasn't been easy to get our costs under control.

For years, I came to the UBCM, and I promised that we'd have the same kind of disciplines and the same kind of legislation that you face, legislation that required us to balance our budgets, legislation that said we would not allow our legacy to the next generation of British Columbians to be massive debt and massive deficits.

We had a plan, and it's working. For the first time in 15 to 20 years, British Columbians are paying the lowest interest rates of any province in Canada because we borrowed \$4.2 billion less than what was originally anticipated. That's been estimated to save you, as taxpayers, \$125 million in debt costs.

We said we'd get a handle on provincial finances, and we will. Next February we will have the first truly balanced budget that we've had in this province for years and years and years.

And believe me, I have heard from your, from our MLAs, from all over this province, how difficult that's been in your communities. We've tried to focus our resources where you tell us you want them to be focused the most.

We've had a 23 per cent increase in health care funding. We've added \$58 million to secure more physicians in the rural and remote areas of the province of British Columbia. And we're starting to see results.

We've reduced the number of nursing vacancies in the province. We're training nurses all over British Columbia, and by 2006, there will be over 2,000 nurses a year that will be trained so they can serve and provide care to the people of this province.

One of the first UBCM conventions that I came to, as the Mayor of Vancouver, I can recall Joanne Monaghan standing up and saying that they needed assistance to provide for travel assistance for people from remote communities down to the health care that they needed.

I can tell you that as of next April 1, that travel assistance plan will be in place. It will be \$5 million, and it will be put to work for your citizens in your communities.

The measures that we've taken are starting to have an effect. You can see that; you can see it taking place across our province. In August alone, we created 6,900 new jobs in

British Columbia. Believe it or not, that was the best job creation rate of any province in the country. Since 2001, we've added 93,000 jobs in our province.

We recognize that we have to add jobs in all of the province of British Columbia, and often those numbers don't reflect what's taking place in your community, but I also think we have to recognize and put it in context. While in British Columbia we've created 93,000 new jobs; in the United States they have lost 2.7 million jobs.

We are trying to build an economy that encourages investment. We're going to build an economy that says: if you're a job creator, we want you here in B.C.

In the first half of this year, our exports grew at 15 times the national rate. Capital investment in British Columbia is destined to be the third highest in our country, this year. The number of new businesses that are being created across the province is back up to the highest levels it's been since 1997. Our housing industry is booming; our residential construction industry is booming. In fact, our residential building permits are increasing at four times the national rate. Mineral exploration throughout our province is two times what it was just two years ago.

No sector is growing faster and stronger in our economy than the energy sector, especially oil and gas exploration. Energy is part of the heartlands' future, and energy is going to be part of driving our economy forward. We are rapidly becoming an energy powerhouse for our country and for the continent.

Energy exports are up 96 per cent in the first half of this year. Summer exploration, which we've been told for years was something that we had to bring to British Columbia, is up 126 per cent this year.

The Peace River region of the northeast is literally buzzing with activity.

And I'm sure you've all heard this, but we have just completed the largest single sale of petroleum and natural gas rights ever: \$418 million in one single day.

That didn't happen by accident. It happened because we asked the industry what they needed to create in a climate where they would invest. We changed the royalty rates. We changed the regulatory codes. We wanted to encourage summer drilling. We wanted to encourage the drilling of deep wells. We wanted to encourage the drilling of low-productivity wells. And the industry has responded. That \$418 million is just the first step. It represents literally years of work for British Columbians and there's so much more we can do.

Offshore oil and gas is beckoning us. We're at work now, building the information that we need, building the science that we need so that we can pursue that.

I asked Mr. Martin, and I asked the federal government to join us as we open up opportunity for First Nations on Vancouver Island, on the north coast and throughout this

province, as we look at exploiting offshore oil and gas for the people of British Columbia in a way that is scientifically and environmentally sound.

There is coalbed methane in literally every region of this province: 90 trillion cubic feet. There is a market dying for us to access it.

We have changed the framework so we can encourage that investment — whether it's in the Kootenays, whether it's in the Cariboo, or whether it's in the north. All of those opportunities are a result of changes that have made to encourage people to invest in British Columbia.

Another part of our energy policy was to encourage new, alternative green-energy sources. Will we keep your rates down? We intend to maintain energy as a competitive advantage for British Columbians and we will. We want to make sure that we reach out and we tap into the expertise of the private sector and independent power producers. We want to be sure that we take advantage of the alternative energy sources that we have available.

So I am pleased to announce today, that we are about to complete the largest purchase of green energy in the history of British Columbia. It will mean \$800 million of private sector investment in your communities and between 800 and a thousand new jobs.

Boston Bar, Castlegar, Revelstoke, Chilliwack, Stewart, Port Alberni, Hope, Gold River, Delta, Holberg, Squamish, Mount Currie, Sechelt, Zeballos – 14 communities; all of them will benefit from these new investments. All of them will benefit from these new jobs.

It's important for us to recognize that our province works best when it is firing on all of its cylinders, when it's taking advantage of all of the god-given gifts in British Columbia.

Each of you have said to me in the last little while that you're frustrated about how long it takes for you to take advantage of the resources in your region or the resources in your communities. You're frustrated by the lack of timely access. You're frustrated that in your community there's an investor who somehow comes up against a wall in Victoria. We want to fix that. We're going to address that challenge, and we're going to address it with you.

I'm going to create a special task force of rural MLAs to undertake an immediate review of our operational decision-making roadblocks and our Crown land management. It's going to be chaired by Bill Belsey from the North Coast. He's going to be joined by John Wilson, Walt Cobb, Bill Bennett, Gillian Trumper and Rod Visser.

They're going to come to you at the local level, and they're going to go to all sectors of the economy, and they're going to ask people: “What do we need to do to allow you to create the jobs that you want in your communities?”

Mining, forestry, energy, tourism, recreation, small businesses — all of those are critical to the heartlands of our province. All of those are critical to British Columbia.

So in case there was any doubt, let the word go out: If you want to create jobs, if you want to invest, our answer is, “Yes, you can in British Columbia.” When you show up at a government window, there won't be someone to tell you: “I'm sorry, you'll have to wait.” There will be someone saying to you: “What can I do to help?”

These are all important initiatives, and they're initiatives that speak to the strength of our province.

Many of you have told me that you want to be more included, and so today I would like to explain to you what we intend to do as we move forward to build two other industries.

First, the tourism industry. There are many who have said to us that they think our parks are closed to people. Well, our parks in British Columbia are there for people. They're there for you. They're there for your communities. We want to make sure that as we move forward and designate lands as parks, that always the invitation is there to you to tell us what you think we need to do.

Currently, there are 34 protected areas that have been designated for potential parks. Before we decide to do that — and we will do that by sometime next year — we intend to deal directly with your councils and your regional districts to see what you want.

In the meantime, this fall we're going to make some important changes that assure us that people know that they're invited to be part of our parks system. We can create opportunities and park lodges and recreational activities to allow people to visit their parks and to use them more fully.

And believe me, I have heard what you have had to say about your rec sites and about your roads to get you there. I want you to know that we're going to be sure that your rec sites and your roads are safe and secure for you to use.

Another sector of our economy has been particularly hard hit this year. They've had drought. They've had BSE. They've had forest fires. Their range land has been burnt. Their fencing is gone. Our ranching community has been under enormous natural attack.

In response to that challenge, we are providing \$5 million in aid from the national BSE recovery program. We're working with federal government, and we'll continue to do that.

But today I'm also announcing that we will be allowing the deferral of grazing agreement fees on Crown land, until next year, so that ranchers have an opportunity to decide for themselves what they'd like to do. This will mean that ranchers who would otherwise face bills in November, will not face them until next year.

I have instructed our officials in forestry and in agriculture to allow greater flexibility in range leases, to help ranchers cope with the drought and with BSE.

I was in Louis Creek recently, and there were some ranchers that greeted me there. I asked one of them, "Well, how are you doing?" and she said: "It's been tough. But, you know, we're going to get through this. This is our ranch; this is our home. We intend to rebuild and restore our ranch." I asked her to tell me about what they've been faced with, and she said: "Well, we've had BSE, and you know about that. We've had the forest fires that have burned our range lands, and you know about that. I had to evacuate my animals. I got back in, and I evacuated. I thought I'd taken all my animals and evacuated them to a safe place. But I had a prize stallion. I left my prize stallion in what I thought was a safe place, and two days later, it had been killed by a bear."

Now, you know, that woman and her husband are the strength of British Columbia. Despite all they've gone through, they're staying, they're rebuilding, they're positive and they're going to make it happen. My hat goes off to them for their work and their determination.

It's been a long summer, but we are fortunate to live in this great province.

Last year at this time, I came to you, and I told you we had a goal to try and win one of the biggest prizes in the world, the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. And we won.

As you leave this convention, remember this: we won because of you. We won because of your spirit, because of your commitment of your communities.

As I travelled the province, there wasn't a community that wasn't excited by the opportunities the Olympics presented: thousands of jobs, sure; billions of investment, sure. But the Olympics presented more than that to you. It presented an opportunity to dream again. It presented an opportunity to think of what you could do for the next generation of your community. It presented the opportunity for you to think how you could be the best you could possibly be.

I'm very proud of the fact that we have 81 Olympic committees, from across this province today, that are at work trying to take advantage and see the opportunities of the Olympics.

I'm going to invite you, all of you who are interested and all of those communities, down to the Lower Mainland later this fall to talk about what you need to have happen for you.

Olympic live sites — you've been great on those, coming up with many great ideas. But one of the things that I've heard from you in local government is that you want to become a training site. We want to try and build a program that will encourage training to take place in your part of the province, in your community, in your regions so that the international community will come and feel at home there, as they train in 2007, 2008, 2009 and up to 2010.

I can tell all of you, and many of you have come and asked me about this: the commitment you've made to make sure that the Olympics works for your community will not go unfulfilled. We will be sure that we are there for you because we know that you were there for your young people, in your communities.

British Columbia is an exceptional place. You are exceptional people. You belong to an exceptional organization.

One hundred meetings of thinking of what you can do, not what you can't. One hundred meetings of thinking how we can reach higher because our challenge is not that we might reach too high, it is that we might reach too low.

So let's join together and reach high. Let's remember what we can do when we are united as a province, in common purpose and common goals. Let's remember how great British Columbians are, and let's try and make sure that our governments reflect that greatness.

Thank you very much.