

UBC Okanagan Announcement

Premier Gordon Campbell March 17, 2004

Check Against Delivery

One of the great opportunities you get when you're Premier is to travel to all different parts of the province. The Okanagan is one of those areas where people dream big dreams, where they have a great imagination for what they can accomplish if we just give them opportunities and the help that they need to get where they want to go.

Forty years ago, a group of 17 Okanagan residents met to talk about how to keep young people in the region. They talked about how to make education more affordable to those young people. They talked about attracting and retaining business and investment in their region of the province. As a result of that meeting, the Okanagan Regional College was established in 1965.

Lots has changed in the Okanagan in those 40 years. Forty years ago, the entire population of the region was 54,000 people. Today it's six times that number - over 315,000 people. One thing, though, has not changed - the Okanagan has continually elected excellent people to come and speak on their behalf in the Legislatures of British Columbia.

John Weisbeck was elected in 1996. He worked very hard throughout his first term and subsequently since we formed government to light the flame of excitement about advanced education in this region of the province, carrying the torch for learning for people in every part of the great Okanagan Valley. I want to say thank you to John for his persistence and his tenacity as we've reached this day today.

And John has been joined in that effort by his colleagues representing the entire Okanagan region of this great province: Tom Christensen, the Minister of Education, from Okanagan-Vernon; Rick Thorpe, the Minister of Provincial Revenue, from Okanagan-Westside; Bill Barisoff, the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection and the MLA for Penticton-Okanagan Valley; George Abbott, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Management and MLA for Shuswap; and Wendy McMahon, our caucus chair and the MLA for Columbia River-Revelstoke.

I also have to take a moment to thank the Minister of Advanced Education. Shirley Bond was asked to take on this task almost three years ago now. She has been a relentless advocate and an innovator. She has worked carefully and closely with her staff, with regional boards and with community boards all over this province to try and create a new vision for advanced education that meets the needs of our children.

Because of her hard work and the work of all of the MLAs in establishing a strong and solid financial foundation for B.C., within the next six years, any B.C. student who graduates from high school with a B-or-better average will be able to get into university where they live and get a great education. On behalf of all of your colleagues, Shirley, I want to say thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of all British Columbians in that regard.

Today, it wouldn't be right for me to stand here without recognizing another tireless campaigner for advanced education in the Okanagan region. Sindi Hawkins cannot be with us today. She is going through another journey right now, a difficult journey, and I know that all our prayers and our hopes are with her as she carries that journey on. But I had an e-mail from Sindi last night, and she said her thoughts are with you and she's excited about our future and she's excited about what you can do in the Okanagan region. She sends you her very best.

Kelowna is the largest city outside of the Lower Mainland in our province. The growth potential of this part of the province is phenomenal. You are an exemplary model of a diversified economy. You are the high-tech hub of the Interior. Your leading-edge clusters and aerospace and biotech and environmental technology companies are all recognized across the province. You have the number-one job creation record in B.C. with 25,600 new jobs created in the Thompson-Okanagan last year alone. From aeronautics to grape genomics, from beaches to peaches, the Okanagan has it all.

Forty years ago, it was time for a new educational engine, a new generation of opportunity. Today I think the Okanagan is ready for the next generation of educational opportunities. I hope it will be a generation that builds on the strengths of the universities and colleges that serve us all, especially the two great institutions that responded directly to the needs of the people of the Okanagan and the province of British Columbia: Okanagan University College and the University of British Columbia. It was clear early on that both of those institutions were interested first and foremost in students, and adding to and complementing the great strengths of this region of the province.

Today I'd like to take you briefly through the decision-making process that we've had to make. It's been a difficult and challenging decision only because there were two such excellent proposals that were presented to us as a government. We wanted to be sure that we met the needs and concerns of the people in the communities and the students of the Okanagan. We wanted to be sure that we were responding to your ideas and the enthusiasm.

This started some time ago, not just recently, not just in the last couple of weeks or couple of months, or even couple of years. In fact, four years ago Ted Swart, Paul Mitchell and the University 2000 committee launched an effort to bring a university to the Okanagan. Ted presented to the Select Standing Committee on

Education back in November of 2001. He told us that B.C.'s fastest growing university-aged cohort of 18-to-24 year olds is right here in the Okanagan. Yet he pointed out that post-secondary spaces per capita are half of the provincial average. Ted told us the Okanagan high school students have among the highest completion rates in B.C., yet he pointed out that the percentage of post-secondary graduates was half the provincial average.

Ted told us something even more important than those statistics. He talked to us about his 7-year-old grandson, Christopher, who was in grade 2. Ted said: "I hope Christopher won't have to wait ten years for the gift of living in a region that has its own university." Today I'm pleased to tell you, Christopher's wait is about to end.

I know that Ted is here today. I want to say thank you to Ted and to the University 2000 group for the work that they've done on your behalf.

In December, the B.C. Progress Board released a report calling for a full university for the Okanagan. They suggested we pursue one of two different options: either expand OUC's mandate or partner with an existing university benefiting from established programs, research and donor base. Clearly, each option carried its own strengths, and our goal was to try and maximize those strengths as we moved forward. We identified ten specific goals for ourselves.

First, we wanted to be sure that we created post-secondary seats in the Okanagan when they needed them. It was important for us to create 6,500 new student spaces by 2009-10 in a way that minimizes costs to government while maximizing quality for students.

We wanted to ensure that what was committed to could be delivered. We wanted to build on community strengths and enhance access throughout the southern Interior.

We wanted to create a research capability that would complement existing research activities in Summerland and White Lake. We wanted to attract researchers of the highest caliber in the Okanagan in a cost-effective manner. That was critical to us because we recognized how strong that research component can be in terms of economic development.

We wanted to establish an international reputation for students and faculty and the institution as quickly as possible. We wanted to develop regional economic potential. Every university should be part of a regional strategy to expand opportunity, to expand learning, to expand training and to expand the prosperity of any region of the province.

We wanted to create new jobs and economic spinoffs right here in the Okanagan. We wanted to complement existing post-secondary programs. Most importantly of all, we wanted to be sure we did this in a way that met your needs.

Having laid out those objectives, and these two options, we then worked to develop evaluation criteria. We said we had to have access and choice available to people. We were determined to provide quality. We were determined that our decisions must result in regional economic benefits. We were determined that we do this in the most cost-effective way for government and for the taxpayers of the province. We were determined that we would have the ability to deliver on our commitments to you.

At the end of the day, what we kept hearing from community leaders, from board members, from others who lived in the Okanagan, from our MLAs throughout the Okanagan, was this: make a decision that we can stand behind with confidence, that we can deliver on quickly, that will be comprehensive and that will be cost-effective.

Your message was clear. More university spaces, now and quickly. Research capacity, now and quickly. Graduate-level programs, quickly. Enhanced college-level training, trades and transfer programs and laddering through the college system into universities, quickly.

In the end, we had an obligation to the young people that live here. For too long, we left them alone. We have to open those doors to opportunity and we have to do it now. We have to do it quickly. Every year we lose is a year they've lost. We should stop that as quickly as we can.

Today I am pleased to announce that, for the first time ever, the Okanagan will have its own full university with the establishment of a new UBC-Okanagan campus at the North Kelowna campus.

This UBC-Okanagan campus will have its own independent senate that will set academic standards and programs that will meet the needs of people in the Okanagan. It will be directed by the people of the Okanagan for the benefit of the people of the Okanagan.

Equally importantly, a new separate Okanagan College will expand trades and applied training programs throughout the Okanagan region of this province.

The new Okanagan College will be the second-largest college outside of the Lower Mainland. Both of these institutions will mean new spaces, new access, new research, new business partnerships, new growth, new jobs, and new opportunities for this great part of British Columbia. Most importantly of all, both of those institutions will be up and running by September of 2005.

There will be 7,500 university seats at UBC-Okanagan by 2010. There will be 4,600 college seats at Okanagan Colleges by 2010. That means we will be doubling the current seats in the region within six years.

The province will be investing \$80 million in capital improvements to establish a full university infrastructure at the North Kelowna campus. UBC will be using its \$2 billion asset base to leverage those provincial initiatives to deliver far more than the province could ever deliver on its own.

Today I'm pleased to announce that UBC will be add 1,000 new dormitory spaces as well as investing in new research and lab facilities right here in Kelowna in the Okanagan region.

There will be \$45 million in incremental operating costs. There will be \$193 million in estimated capital investment, and there will be \$70 million invested by UBC alone.

It's essential as we build a comprehensive research institution with comprehensive capacity that the entire southern Interior has the opportunity to benefit. The University of B.C. Vancouver attracts \$350 million in research funding each year. The 500 brand-new graduate students that will be part of UBC-Okanagan's campus will be part of that exceptional research legacy. UBC itself intends to deliver almost \$75 million of research capacity to the UBC-Okanagan by 2010. That will be a huge benefit to the people and the businesses here in the Okanagan.

Currently the University of British Columbia is ranked 35th in the world. It is 12th in the world amongst public institutions, second in Canada only to the University of Toronto. Needless to say, UBC-Okanagan wants to move up that list, and there's no reason, with your energy, with your enthusiasm, with your commitment, that UBC-Okanagan won't be number one and knock the University of Toronto off its spot.

I don't want to claim that this is a new model. You've heard of campuses like UCLA, University of California-Berkley, University of California-San Francisco, and University of California-San Diego. The top four public universities in the world are part of that University of California model. That is the model that we've adapted here to British Columbia that we believe is a model that we can build on.

Today I am pleased to say that Brad Bennett has agreed to sit on the board of the University of British Columbia. There will be five additional representatives from the Okanagan region who will be sitting on that board.

Like UBC-Vancouver, UBC-Okanagan will be an independent campus directed by its own local senate to meet local priorities. At the same time, the two campuses will share a common board of governors.

The UBC-Okanagan will be able to draw on UBC's established leadership, programs, resources, faculty and research expertise.

The Silicon Vineyard is becoming one of the pre-eminent technology centres in the world. Today the Silicon Vineyard is almost 500 companies in software design, aeronautics and aerospace engineering, electronics and biotech. UBC's enormous institutional strength will leverage private sector growth to an even higher level.

Universities in British Columbia are known for high rates of commercialization. In UBC alone there are 113 spinoff companies, including world leaders like QLT and Westport Innovations. That's going to happen right here in your own backyard in the Silicon Vineyard with UBC-Okanagan.

Imagine the benefits for agriculture. There are 5,600 farms in the Thompson-Okanagan - orchards, vineyards, beef, dairy, grain, vegetables. The UBC faculty of agriculture is already active in the Okanagan. It partners the AgriFood Research Park in Summerland. It's concentrating on food science. Seven of its 25 adjunct professors are already situated in the Summerland research station. UBC-Okanagan will expand and build on that capacity under the direction of the new senate. It will make sure that your programs here in agriculture are complementing your critical agriculture clusters.

It's going to offer five new agriculture courses in the areas of biometeorology and soil sciences, wine research, food sciences, food and resource economics and landscape research. Imagine the benefits for the wine industry. We have some of the world's great wineries right here in the Okanagan producing millions of dollars worth of the best wines in the world.

UBC's wine research centre has just launched an international grape gene-sequencing project. It's collaborating with Spain. There's \$3.1 million to be spent in B.C. The Okanagan will now have direct access to those scientists, those labs and that research.

Think of the life sciences opportunities. UBC and the province have already committed \$134 million to a life sciences initiative. It includes new medical spaces at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, new medical spaces and training at the University of Northern British Columbia, new medical spaces and training at the University of Victoria. That was phase one.

Now, just think where phase two is going to take place. How does Kelowna sound? How does the Okanagan sound? UBC-Okanagan's research base will include innovation in health, biotechnology, pharmacy and genome science.

As we talk about the excitement of the possibilities of UBC-Okanagan, I want everyone to remember the incredibly important role that the Okanagan College is playing.

When I met with mayors from communities throughout this region, they were all concerned the lights were going out on their campuses. I want those mayors and the people they represent to know this: the lights are coming back on. The lights are going to shine brighter. The lights are going to enhance your opportunity.

You've said it was critical that we maintain affordable college track systems in the Okanagan, and enhanced trades certificate and training and transfer programs. The KLO campus will become the home of the new Okanagan College. Programs and training options will be expanded to Okanagan College campuses in Penticton and Vernon and Salmon Arm.

There's something even more important. I can tell you today, as an immediate benefit of the university being put over to UBC-Okanagan, college track students at OUC will see a reduction in their tuition of \$1,000 a year, starting in September of this year.

There are few days in public life that can be as exciting as this one, because I believe it's an opportunity to liberate people of this region of the province to pursue their own dreams and their own objectives. It's been an opportunity for us to build on the excitement and the dream and the enthusiasm of the people that live in this great part of our province.

I can't think of another announcement that we could make that would generate as much in terms of economic and social benefits as the one that we are making today. It is estimated that the annual economic spinoff of the new UBC-Okanagan and the new Okanagan College will add \$500 million a year into the economy of

the Okanagan.

The critical thing for us today is to continue building on the enthusiasm that brought us to this day. The new UBC-Okanagan board of governors will include representatives from your region of the province. Each campus will have its own senate. The new campus will be led by a vice-president of academics. But it will be independent. It will be driven by your dreams. It will be informed by your enthusiasm.

The new Okanagan College will have the new board of directors and president, new executive and department heads, and a new administrative structure.

Forty years ago, 17 people got in a room and said it's time to we made this region got a chance to be a lot bigger and a lot better. Today we're making an announcement that I hope each of you in the Okanagan and, equally important, people across British Columbia will greet with enthusiasm as we stride forward to create an even better province with even more opportunities for everyone that lives in British Columbia.

In the Okanagan the best is yet to come, and I know that you will all deliver it. Thank you very much.

