

Premier Gordon Campbell
Speech to North Central Municipal Association Convention
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Check Against Delivery

People were excited last year from across the province – from the north to the south, the east to the west – when we succeeded in winning the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

One of the things that everyone's told us with regard to the games is you get out of them what you put into them, and the sooner you start the better off you are. It didn't matter whether you're talking to the people from Salt Lake or the people from Sydney or any other Olympic city. They said the sooner you start the better off you are.

There's only 2,099 days until the torch is lit, and I want people in Fort Nelson to remember that – particularly for your kids, because your kids are the ones that are going to benefit from this in the long term.

I can't remember when I first heard of this, but the city of Terrace is recommending the Kermode Bear as the symbol for the Olympics. In spite of what Dick Pound might think, I actually have no control over the Olympic board. But I think it's a great symbol. I want to thank Terrace for picking up the spirit and moving it forward, because 2010 is for all British Columbia.

It's also great to be in Fort Nelson. About a week ago, we presented the first ever B.C. community achievement awards. Dr. Anthony Kenyon from Fort Nelson was one of the recipients. The important part about this is the awards are to recognize how much people contribute to our province, how much they contribute to our well-being, how their individual leadership, individual commitment to one another, individual sharing and giving to one another really creates the spirit of community that I felt last night when I came here to your convention, and that I feel in communities all over the province.

Dr. Anthony Kenyon has lived in Fort Nelson for over 40 years. He has provided exceptional health care to the people of Fort Nelson. He has reached out. He's provided training and opportunities for people, and I think it's great to be here and to celebrate the contribution of a citizen like that.

You know, when I got up this morning, I thought to myself: what's going to be different today? What is going to really make the world seem a little better? Then I realized that I was going to be here with Ted, the chair of a regional district. Ted's been hanging around those regional districts for over 20 years now. He comes to me and he says: "Hi, Gord. Regional districts. Don't forget regional districts."

Here he is, your leader, the head of the NCMA, a man who really has made an exceptional contribution to all of us for over a quarter century at the Cariboo Regional

District. Ted Armstrong, I want to say that you are an example of great local leadership, great regional leadership, who never forgets your role in providing services to citizens. It's great to see you this morning.

I'd be remiss if I didn't introduce my colleagues. I get to be called Premier and boy, that's a wonderful thing. But one of the great things about it is I get to work with a truly exceptional group of people.

We're all enjoying the hospitality of Fort Nelson today. The first elected official of Fort Nelson that I ever met was Dick Neufeld who was at one time the mayor of Fort Nelson. He's taken a couple of steps down – now, he's the Minister of Energy and Mines.

You know, Dick has done a truly exceptional job in his ministry. He came to us with a plan almost two and a half years ago and he said this is what we think we can do to open up the oil and gas industry in British Columbia. This is how we can become recognized, internationally as a major supplier of energy and opportunities, and most importantly, here's how we can establish the long-term stability we need for our oil and gas industry. We will do it for communities of the north. We will contribute to the services that we have in the province. We will include first nations. We will bring people from across the world to look at British Columbia and see that we can develop our assets.

You can see the results. In 2003 the number of wells that we drilled in this province was up 56 per cent. The industry investment was \$3.5 billion. We now have the oil and gas industry contributing more to provincial coffers than the forest industry does. More important than that, we have people in the industry bragging about what British Columbia is doing and what British Columbia offers. That's because of the leadership of one person, Dick Neufeld.

I'm also very pleased that I'm here today with Pat Bell, the Minister of State for Mining. In the north, you understand the value of mining. You understand what it can do to support families and to give them the opportunity to build a future. When Pat was put in charge of making sure that we moved our mining industry forward, we had one objective: to restore mining as a critical component of our economy for the province and its future.

What's happened? In the last three years we've watched as mining exploration has doubled – and it's expected to double again this year. We have more to go. But I can tell you that Pat is committed to building on Dick's work and that's starting to pay off.

There are 46 major mining exploration projects taking place north of Williams Lake, and they're showing significant potential. Mayor Rick Gibson in Williams Lake will tell you that Gibraltar copper mine is about to open up and restart. That's going to be 290 jobs for Williams Lake. We know that the Wolverine mine near Tumbler Ridge is looking forward to starting construction in November of this year, 210 jobs.

It's possible that they're going to be able to revitalize the Mount Milligan mine near MacKenzie. There's a potential \$500 million of investment, and another 375 jobs. That's

because of leadership from people like Pat Bell and equally importantly, from each of you as mayors and from the people who recognize what mining means to the future of the province of British Columbia.

We're also joined today by Roger Harris from Skeena. Roger has taken on the task of making sure that our forest industry is up and running and small operators have equal opportunities succeed in B.C.'s forest sector. Roger has taken on the task of dealing with the pine beetle, something that each and every one of your communities and certainly the whole province is going to have to deal with.

We've got a new generation of action plans in place. We're ready to move forward with that. Roger's leadership is going to be critical to that. We have to understand that there is more than one forest and more than two forests in British Columbia. We have to have a way that we can respond to the needs of the land base and the forest infrastructure in different parts of the province in different ways. I can tell you Roger Harris is going to do that. Roger Harris understands the forests. He understands the north.

Also, I want to say a special thank you to Shirley Bond from Prince George-Mount Robson. Now, Shirley was elected in 2001 with the rest of us and she took on a task of revitalizing our advanced education system. She took on the task of trying to make sure we had an apprenticeship program that worked for people.

You know, it's incredible when we think about what we used to do to people who we claimed we were going to try and help with apprenticeship programs. We said to them: if you don't do exactly what we want exactly when we want it, depending on whether you've got a family or not, depending on whether your life circumstances are changing or not, you've got to do exactly what we tell you or you lose all the opportunities for the apprenticeship program.

What we did was we said: why don't we open that up? Why don't we make it more flexible? Why don't we give people the opportunity to have the apprenticeship program work for them? Shirley went through that and has worked hard. We now have more apprentices in training than we've had ever in British Columbia. We have more training opportunities than we've had ever in British Columbia.

On top of that, Shirley Bond is leading the largest expansion of advanced education opportunities in the last 40 years in British Columbia. Shirley Bond is the one that said: "We have to make sure that when our young people go to school and when they graduate, if they're getting a B or better, we have to make sure that they can get the degree they want, the program they want, the learning they want, the education they want, to develop the tools that they want. This was what was important, and they have to get it virtually anywhere in the province."

So there's a new university in the Southern Interior. There's a new university in Kamloops. There's been an expansion of Northern Lights College by 250 seats. There's

been an expansion of technology opportunities at BCIT and at the new Kwantlen University College technology centre.

Together with industry, we're investing \$1 million in a partnership to provide the skills and the training that people need to get involved in the oil and gas industry in this province, first nations and non-first nations, so we can open up those opportunities to everyone.

Shirley Bond has been someone who has unlocked the door to opportunity for our young people in this province, and I want to say thank you, Shirley, for what you've done.

I don't know how many of you noticed this, but every single one of those cabinet ministers was from the north. Bill Belsey is the chair of our northern caucus. He can't be with us today, but I can tell you Bill is an example of someone who's captured the spirit of the communities that he serves and who has taken their voices down to Victoria.

I'm particularly pleased to be here with Herb Pond and his colleagues from Prince Rupert. Prince Rupert is a town that took quite a few little hits through the 1990s. Lots of towns would just sit down and say: "Gosh, I wish it was like it used to be. It's so tough. It's so difficult." But Prince Rupert never did that. I've noticed that in the province right now. There are literally dozens of communities that are thinking about their future, that are making plans, that are thinking of what they need to do. Prince Rupert for me is always an exemplar of that.

When I arrive at Prince Rupert, Bill Belsey takes me along and says: "Here, you've got to talk to Herb." Herb will come in, and he'll sit down with his council and say: "Look, this is what we're trying to do. We want to make sure we open this port up. We're tired of people not seeing Prince Rupert as a major opportunity to the north, as a major opportunity for British Columbia, and - this is important - as a major opportunity for Canada. We're tired of them not recognizing what we are. We're closer for our clients to send their goods to Asia. We want to have a port that works. We want to have a port that's got container facilities that are modern and create opportunities that serve the needs of Peace River farmers. We want to have a port that Albertans and Albertan industry can say: we want to push it through there."

You know what we're doing? At the end of this month the Alberta cabinet and the B.C. cabinet are meeting in Prince Rupert. I'll tell you: we're going to push for that port to open up as the city of Prince Rupert has. We're going to push to make sure that their cruise ship industry continues to build. We're going to push as British Columbians and as Canada recognizes what Prince Rupert can mean for all of us in the north. That's because of one thing: the drive, the commitment, the vision and the leadership of your local council and Herb Pond, and I want to say thanks, Herb.

Walt Cobb from Cariboo South has talked about how we can expand educational opportunities. He's got a new campus in Williams Lake for the former University College of the Cariboo, which is now going to become a new university for the Central Interior

and a centre of distance learning that will create new opportunities for degrees for young people across this province.

Dennis MacKay has worked very hard not just on the mining initiative and the oil and gas initiative but also on the whole initiative for the northern corridor to think about how the north can work together as one and maximize the benefits of that.

John Wilson is someone who has never forgotten his roots, and has never forgotten the importance of the cattle industry and of our natural resources. John consistently reminds us of the commitments that we've made and of the opportunities that are created here in the north.

Finally, Blair Lekstrom from Peace River South and Dawson Creek can't be with us today. But Blair also has never lost track of the important role that his community has played for him. Ask Blair and Dick what we need to do up in the Peace and Dick and Blair will say: "Roads. We really want you to come up to the Peace River so you can see how bad our roads are. By the way, did we mention that we need more roads here?"

I first came to a conference of the NCMA in Quesnel in 1992. I was on the executive of the UBCM then and it was a convention in the ice rink. Joanne Monahan was standing up and she was talking about a resolution where she said: "We want someone to start thinking about creating a travel assistance program to support patients when they go to health care facilities that they need."

Well, that was a long time ago. But because of the leadership of the NCMA, because of the consistency, the persistent pursuit of that goal and objective, I can tell you now that finally in British Columbia there is a \$5-million travel assistance program to help people from rural and remote communities to come and get the health care they need and give them the financial support they need.

It is really important, though, as we think of what you're facing and what we're facing to recognize this. The world's changed. I will bet you when the first convention was started there weren't a whole lot of people talking about how much Fort Nelson was contributing to our economy. I will bet you there were a lot of voices that felt like they were in the wilderness saying: "What about us? What about the north?"

The great thing about the north is all of you tell us what the problems are, but you also tell us what solutions are. All of you suggest if you could just be given the opportunity, there really isn't much that you can't accomplish. We're working with you to give you that opportunity, and we're working hard at it with ten MLAs that are listening to what your communities say.

We're seeing advantages of that already. We're watching as the forest industry is growing. I was in Sharon's town, in Houston, just a while ago opening the world's largest sawmill. We've watched as our forest industry is starting to attract investment again. Steve Thorlakson from Fort St. John is going to have a mill of \$200 million OSB plant. We're watching as there are new value-added factories added across the north. We're going to

be able to do that not just because of the work of Roger Harris, but because of the work of each of you within your communities and recognizing what you have to offer.

One of the things that we're trying to do right now is develop an oil and gas approach that that actually encourages major investors to look at the enormous energy potential here in British Columbia. Last year when Premier Klein and I went down to the States, people in the United States are saying they know Alberta's there, but boy, are they glad British Columbia's here and that we have a minister who understands their industry.

Pat Bell talks a lot about mining now, but he still talks about the Nechako Basin and the Bowser Basins where we have about 18 trillion cubic feet of natural gas potential. That's huge. Has anyone been to the gas pumps lately? Has anyone looked at what's happening with energy lately? Has anyone looked at what they think some of their opportunities might be if they leave it up to Saudi Arabia to say they're going to increase supply? Let's leave it up to British Columbia. We'll increase supply. We'll make sure the market's there and we'll drive down prices.

I've noticed the naysayers are out there on offshore oil and gas. There are people that say that the Royal College doesn't have any scientific background and don't know what they're doing. They've already said quite clearly we can do offshore oil and gas exploration in an environmentally sound way. They told us the science is all there. They told us there's no reason why they should be able to do it in England and not in British Columbia, in Norway and not in British Columbia, in the United States and not in British Columbia, in Venezuela and not in British Columbia, in Newfoundland for goodness' sake and not in British Columbia. Newfoundland has got an iceberg highway and they can do it.

We can do it in British Columbia, but we have to tell people we can do it. We have to tell people we want to do it. I ask you and your councils and your citizens to get involved in that and tell the national panel that you want offshore oil and gas exploration, done sensibly, done reasonably, but there are huge opportunities for us across the north and across the country if we do that. We need your help to do that.

As we do that, we know it's critical for us to provide the meaningful transportation infrastructure and investment that's so critical across the North. In transportation there are a couple of things that we have to be aware of. The first one is we have to know that now we have to learn to transport information. That's what's so critical about Network B.C. Network B.C. has already reached 25 communities north of 100 Mile House. More this year will be included, including Kitwanga and Grand Isle and Bear Lake and Pouce Coupe, because we know that connecting people to broadband connects them to opportunities and gives them choices.

The great thing about small towns in British Columbia is great spirit. They have great commitment to one another. We don't want to drive people out of those towns because they're not connected into the opportunities that exist through the Internet and through broadband access.

Our goal is to make sure that every community in British Columbia is connected, and I can tell you this: by 2006 every community in British Columbia will be connected, and that will help all of us in this province.

We're also going to continue the investments that we've started to make in transportation. \$1.3 billion of transportation investments are going to be made over the next three years. Over 60 per cent of those investments are in northern and rural communities in British Columbia because we know for a long time you were short-changed. That shouldn't happen.

I want to close with two things, and the first one is the B.C. Rail investment partnership. This is going to be the most critical transportation infrastructure investment that you've seen for a long time in northern British Columbia. It's going to connect your resources to their customers. It's going to give us the opportunity to provide over \$30 million of improvements to the port of Prince Rupert. It's going to take Peace River farmers and say: at last you can have the kind of access you need to your markets to the west as well as to the east. It's going to say to the people east of us: come through British Columbia. Let us share with you our access to outside markets.

There's going to be a \$135-million northern development initiative, including \$15 million each for the four regions in the north, and \$50 million for cross-northern initiatives where you decide, not Victoria, what you want to have happen to build a stronger northern opportunity. The northern development initiative will be headquartered in Prince George. It'll be run by northerners. It will be northern solutions for northern problems. I think it's a critical part of strengthening and enhancing northern opportunities for the years ahead.

There'll be a \$4-million expansion for the Prince George airport. One of our goals when we set out our transportation plan was to provide the resources for expansion of other airports.

In Terrace I know they'd like to expand their airport and that's going to happen. It's going to work for Terrace. We're going to help expand Fort Nelson airport because we know that air transportation is important. And you know what? If Air Canada doesn't serve Fort Nelson we'll get other air carriers to serve Fort Nelson, because that's what we have to do.

There'll be a million dollar wheel shop expansion in Prince George from the BC Rail Partnership. There'll be \$8.3 million a year coming into coffers from local governments up and down the line. There'll be a new passenger service that will create hundreds of jobs and enormous opportunities in tourism across the north. All of those things are going to be the result of that investment partnership.

As we look to the future, we need you to continue having your vision and your thoughts about where you want your communities and your regions to go in this province. The north is an incredibly important part of British Columbia.

I've known enough of you long enough, Rich and Tom and others from across the north that served years and years in local government in the north who have shown their own leadership and their own commitment to creating the kind of future you deserve. If you look to a new future in the north it's a future that embraces energy. It's a future that embraces forestry. It's a future that embraces mining. It's a future that embraces tourism. It's a future that embraces educational opportunities for young people here so they can stay in the north and build their future in the north. It's a future that embraces providing health care for people in the north.

For the first time, because of the leadership of northern communities and northern local leaders, we're going to be training doctors in the north for the north and they're going to serve the needs in the north. For those who tell you it doesn't matter where people are trained, where they get their education, I want to tell you this: they're wrong. There are 38 nursing graduates this year from UNBC and 33 of them have been recruited to stay right here in the North.

I know that all of you over the next little while as you sit in this convention are going to have a chance to talk with one another, to learn from one another, to pick up some good ideas. And you should know that your voices are not going unheard.

You know what your communities do? They think of how they solve problems. You don't hesitate to come to Victoria and tell us maybe we should do it differently. Maybe we should have a different perspective. Maybe we should start thinking about how all governments can work together and bring everyone together to meet the needs of the people that we serve, whether you're living in Stewart or whether you're living in Fort Nelson, whether you're living in Prince George or you're living in Williams Lake. How can we work together? How can we build on the strengths of the people that we serve?

I want you to know this. This is a province that has lots of opportunity, and that opportunity is within your reach. All you need to do is reach out to seize it, to keep driving for it and you're going to create a whole new north for the next generation of northerners, a whole new sense of confidence, excitement and understanding of the potential for the north for the young people that live here, for the communities that are here and for all of us across this province who want to work with you and who always count on you to be there for us.

Thank you.