

Great to see you all. It's great to be here today.

I remember 2002, coming here at the UBCM convention and talking about the potential of what would happen if we won the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2010. You know, that dream is also coming true. In 2010 we're hosting the Games.

And we're very lucky today. We have some really exceptional people that are here with us at the UBCM that I would like to take a moment to introduce to you. First, is the winner of Canada's first gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Carol Huynh from Hazelton.

One of the world's top triathletes — if you want to see grit, if you want to see determination, you should see Simon Whitfield in Beijing as he got a silver medal. You can remember when he got his gold — Simon Whitfield! That was incredible in Beijing. You were just incredible there. Great job!

A member of Canada's gold-winning rowing eights — Malcolm Howard from Victoria!

Five-time Olympian and whitewater kayaking — world champion David Ford!

An Olympic wrestler who competed in Beijing. He took with him not just the Mayor of Port Alberni but 63 supporters from Port Alberni — Travis Cross!

And someone to watch in 2010 in the Paralympic Games, a World Cup ParaNordic athlete, a well-known Whistler resident — Paralympian Tyler Mosher!

Every single one of these people shows us what happens when you have determination, when you stick with it, when you're dedicated. And when you pursue excellence, you can achieve it. I want to say thanks to all of you for the example. I want to thank all of you for the example you set for all of us, for our young kids and I want to ask you if you'll be special Olympic ambassadors for us for 2010. I'm assuming you're going to say yes, so I'd like to give you your special Olympic ambassador scarves.

Carol, thank you. Simon, way to go. Malcolm.

Malcolm won a gold medal in the eight. And in 2012 he's going to compete in London in the singles. He's going to win a gold again. Right, Malcolm?

Thank you. Thanks you guys. You guys can get there. You deserve that. Great job, you guys, and thanks for being here. I appreciate it.

They're all going to stay around, I think. They're in the front here, so you'll see if they're walking out as I carry on with my speech.

Let me start today by saying thanks to a bunch of the people here. You know, the executive of the UBCM works long and incredible hours on behalf of all of you in local government. I think it's important to recognize that they're working on behalf of all of us in British Columbia. They're not averse to identifying what challenges are. But I can tell you this. They always come forward with solutions of how we can build and strengthen the partnership between the provincial government and our local and regional governments. I want to say thanks to the UBCM executive for the work they do.

Every one of you would know that it's the president of the UBCM who takes the lead, who's always in demand not just from you but from us. I want to say a special thank you to Susie Gimse for the work you've done, Susie, in the last year. Thank you very much.

I particularly liked Susie's introduction. She said that I had spoken the UBCM as Premier nine consecutive times. That's pretty difficult because I've only been Premier for seven years. So I'm expecting to come back as Premier for two more years. Thank you very much, Susie.

I want to thank Robert as well for taking on the mantle of being president of the UBCM.

One of the great things that this organization does is it reminds us of the things that we have in common and the things that we share and things that, regardless of whether we're a large community or a small community, actually create the valuable foundation that we're able to build the future of British Columbia on.

So I want to say thanks to you, Robert, for taking that on. I appreciate it.

While I'm at it, I'd be remiss if I didn't thank Ida Chong for the work she's done as the Minister for the last few years, and I've got news for you: you've got a great new minister in Blair Lekstrom. He's got a lot of work to do, but he's going to deliver for you as well.

Just for a moment today, I thought as I came here — I've been coming to the UBCM now since 1985. That was my first UBCM. I was elected in '84 as a councillor. There are two people that passed away this last year who are, I think, reflective of the quality of people that work in local government, often without being noticed — noticed in their communities, certainly, but not all over the province — and I just want to say a special thanks to the mayor of Port Edward, Ed Wampler, who did so much for the northwest and for his town, year in and year out, and to Rich McDaniel, who was a councillor in Terrace for so many years.

You know, they reflect what's best in people who run for office and who attempt to serve the public good. They were generous of spirit. They were kind. They never lost sight of who they were working for. They were great people, and I know you will join me in recognizing how much they're going to be missed, as are others in British Columbia.

They were always here, just like you're here now, and the great thing about this UBCM convention is it does bring people from every corner of the province, from every kind of community, and it reminds us that if we really work together, there are no challenges that we can't confront. If we work with one another openly and honestly, there is nothing that we can't accomplish when we work together. When we recognize that we can in fact learn from one another, when we recognize that when we set our goals and our objectives for ourselves, we can achieve them, this is one of those places in the world where you can actually accomplish those goals.

The most important thing, I think, for everyone that's serving in municipal life is to recognize that you actually start off by thinking: "Here's something I can do that would be good for my community. Here's my idea of what we can accomplish in my town or my city, my region, my regional district. These are the things that I am capable of doing, and I'm willing to put my time and effort into that." And as we celebrate our 150<sup>th</sup> year here in British Columbia, we celebrate great British Columbians like W.A.C. Bennett and Bill Bennett, like Terry Fox and Rick Hansen, like Emily Carr and Nancy Greene.

But you know, there are some people in this room who have made a pretty huge contribution to this province. Some of our mayors have decided not to seek re-election after literally decades of service. I'm going to call out some names, and I hope that these folks will stand up if they're here, because these people have been true leaders in British Columbia.

Colin Kinsley, Jim Davidson, Jeannette Townsend, Ross Priest, Greg Deck, Alan Lowe — all of these people have been leaders in their community, and I want to say thanks for what you've done for your people in your part of the province. They are leaders who ushered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They always had their feet on the ground, but they always had their eyes on the future, and they have made a huge difference, and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

I also want to celebrate the unsung heroes of public life, our public servants. They're the ones who get up every day and work day in and day out to help us accomplish our goals and to transform our dreams into reality. Thanks to all of the public servants who helped make British Columbia public life what it is today.

So as we're here at the close of another UBCM convention, let's think for a minute about why we do this job. What excites us about being elected officials at

the local level or at the provincial level? Really, it's about what we think we can build.

No one knows that better than someone like Colin Kinsley. Prince George is a completely different town in 2008 than it was in 2001, just seven years ago. It was down on its luck and looking for hope. And they had a beacon of hope, and his name was Colin Kinsley. He had a vision. He had a vision for a northern medical school where doctors would be trained for the north. He had a vision for a northern sports centre. He had a vision for a northern cancer centre, for a northern hub of transportation. He had that vision, and he worked on that vision, and he worked day in and day out and month in and month out on behalf of his community, on behalf of the north of British Columbia, and he helped usher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century north for the province of British Columbia.

And people across the north have helped make that happen. Jim Davidson has decided he's not seeking re-election. He was elected in 1989. He saw mining go through one of its roughest patches in the history of the province, but that didn't get Jim down. He led a downtown revitalization of Smithers. He added tourism and transportation to Smithers's 21<sup>st</sup> century vision.

Jim Davidson wanted an expansion of his airport in Smithers, and he wanted an expansion of his airport in Smithers, and he said: what about an expansion for my airport in Smithers? Jim Davidson got an expansion of his airport in Smithers. He didn't quit.

And you won't find anyone who's a stronger advocate for the electrification of Highway 37 and what it can do for the northwest unless it's Jack Talstra. Both Jim and Jack Talstra know how important mining is. They know how important to the economy of the northwest independent power production can be. They know how important jobs can be and investment can be.

The Mining Association of British Columbia just released a report on the Northwest Transmission Line. It's up along Highway 37. They said that that could stimulate thousands of jobs, billions of dollars of economic opportunity and development, more than \$300 million a year in annual tax revenues to government, and across the northwest, communities are telling us that's their vision too.

Well, we're going to make it happen with them.

Today I can tell you that the province will pursue the environmental assessment certificate and First Nations consultations necessary for the vital first steps of the Northwest Transmission Line along Highway 37 to be put in place.

It's going to create jobs. It's going to create opportunities for first nations. It's going to bring clean power to the whole northwest region and eliminate community dependence on dirty diesel for their power.

Independent power and mining opportunities that are moving ahead I think make it pretty clear. There is an enormous opportunity to build a strong partnership in that entire sector of our province, that vast northwest of British Columbia.

Think of the Kootenays just seven years ago and think of it today. Greg Deck and Ross Priest and Mark McKee have all decided that they're not going to seek re-election as mayor, but they'd all tell you that the Kootenays is a totally different place in 2008 than it was in 2001. Investments are at record levels. The College of the Rockies has expanded and it's offering opportunities to Kootenay students in the Kootenays. The Cranbrook Regional Hospital is attracting specialists to meet regional needs for the first time ever. And there's a new airport in Cranbrook that will open up the East Kootenays to the entire world.

I want to thank Greg and Ross and Mark for their leadership, for their commitment and for the example they've set all of us. It's going to make a huge difference in the Kootenays. All those mayors set an example.

There's an awful lot that have decided they're not going to run, but for those of you young guys I don't want you to think you're getting off. Gerry Furney is still going to run. I don't know if Gerry's here. I think I saw him. Gerry was first elected in 1968. I don't remember if I could vote in 1968. But, you know, the thing about Gerry that's important is he never loses sight of the fact that he is the mayor of Port McNeill and as I said to you time and time again, if you ever get a chance, have the four-hour tour of Port McNeill with Gerry Furney. You just can't beat it. Thank you, Gerry, for running again.

And George Ferguson. George Ferguson is still here from Abbotsford. George is a man who's been serving since 1969 and Abbotsford has changed. George has watched as his city has grown, both through population and through acquisition. Four different communities are now part of the Abbotsford that George Ferguson has helped shape as mayor. Thank you, George, for all you've done for the Fraser Valley in British Columbia.

And Jim Ogilvie. Jim Ogilvie was elected in 1965. I don't think they even had invented the metric system in 1965. Jim Ogilvie is there in Kimberley. If you think your town's going through transition, you should see what's happened in Kimberley in the last 20 years. But you should remember this. Jim has always been there for Kimberley. He's converted it, transformed it into a resort municipality with strength so that it brings people from all over the world. He has done an exceptional job for Kimberley. He has done an exceptional job for the Kootenays and for British Columbia. Thank you, Jim Ogilvie, for deciding to run yet again.

Every one of the mayors I've mentioned has something in common. They've all had big plans and more importantly, they've all had the drive to put them into play and to watch through their hard work as their towns and their communities have been transformed. They deserve our thanks for their example and for their leadership. On behalf of all my colleagues I would like to give them that thanks, and on behalf of British Columbians let me say thank you for the leadership you continue all to show.

I don't know what happens with the UBCM, but I can remember in 2001 there was a huge catastrophe that took place just before the UBCM convention that we all had to deal with. We wondered what was taking place in the world. We have some pretty dramatic events taking place outside of us today, outside of British Columbia. I think it's fair to say that people are getting a little bit worried. They look at their RRSPS, and they say to themselves, what happened to that? They watch and they hear the news about house prices seeming to soften and to go down. They wonder to themselves, you know, about their jobs. They see what's happening and they turn on the television...and you can't turn on an American television without hearing about a problem that someone's facing or that they're confronting. And they're still trying to confront it today.

I think we shouldn't underestimate the challenges that confront all of us, because what happens in the world has an impact on British Columbia. But we should remember that sometimes what's happening in British Columbia can have an impact on the rest of the world as well. The big events that happen outside our borders can remind us how small we are, or they can remind us about how lucky we are, how lucky we are to live in Canada, in British Columbia. We're the lucky ones who can choose to shape the future. We're one of the leading economies not just in Canada but on the continent.

Let me repeat that. We are one of the leading economies on the continent. Our economy is diversified and even as the world enters this new century and wonders about what that new century will bring, we have a dramatically expanding range of opportunities that are evolving before our very eyes. If we're smart, if we build on our successes, if we learn from the examples that people that came before us have set, and if we remember how we got here, we can determine the future that we want, drive to it and get there. But we have to decide.

There are big challenges out there — we all know that — especially in forestry. But we're rebuilding that industry. And let me say this. We won't rebuild the forest industry by ripping up the softwood lumber agreement. Everyone should understand this. The softwood lumber agreement put \$2.4 billion into our forest economy in British Columbia. The softwood lumber agreement protects us from having double-digit duties imposed on British Columbia products that go into that marketplace south of the border.

The softwood lumber agreement is the reason that we have watched as our trade with the United States and our percentage of trade with the United States has actually expanded over the last few years compared to other provinces in Canada. It is what's keeping our industry going through probably the most difficult time we've had in history in the forest industry.

They want to rip up the softwood lumber agreement? Give your head a shake. We are not going to do that. Our government will not do that. Our government will stand for it, we'll fight for it and we will defend it, because that's how we're going to make sure that we have a forest industry in the future of British Columbia that's strong and vital and creating jobs for people.

And as we go through this difficult time with the marketplace to the south of us, what we've been trying to do is expand our markets. We've watched as our market, our trade with China has quadrupled in the last three to four years. We've watched as our trade with Korea has doubled and our trade with India has doubled. We're expanding our trade in Europe because what we want to do is diversify our economy, diversify our markets, diversify investment. And guess what happens then? We bring jobs and keep jobs and stabilize jobs right here in the province of British Columbia where they should be.

How many of you have seen pictures of the Richmond speed skating oval as we get prepared for the 2010 Olympics? Have you ever noticed something about those pictures? They're always taking pictures of speed skaters and they're looking up. And what are they looking up at? They're looking up at pine beetle wood being used to cover the largest free-span structure in the world using B.C. products. And guess what? We're exporting those products around the world so people in British Columbia have jobs and opportunities in the future, because that is the future in British Columbia.

On January 1 we're going to actually have buildings up to six storeys built with wood, and we're going to continue to push wood as the building product of choice in B.C. for public buildings, for our schools, for our facilities. And do you know why we're going to do that? Because wood is good. Wood is great. Wood is British Columbia.

Remember, the strong and competitive sectors of our economy are still strong and competitive. Our economy has diversified. While other economies are shedding jobs, we have added 57,000 jobs in the last year alone — 57,000. Now, more than ever, we have to continue to make our economy more productive, more competitive. We have to continue to eliminate unnecessary regulation and we have to continue to lower taxes.

Let's remember just seven years ago we had some of the highest taxes on the continent. Today we're one of the lowest tax regimes anywhere in the G8. Seven

years ago we were a minimum wage, low-employment and low-investment economy. Today we're a high-wage, high-employment and high-investment economy. I have no intention of going back. Now, more than ever, we have to build on our economic strength in every region of British Columbia.

Since 2001 we've created 425,000 net new jobs in this province. This is where the jobs are. This is where the growth is, right here in the province of British Columbia. When people look to the twenty-first century, they look to one place in Canada. They look to your province. They look to your communities. They look to British Columbia.

And when they look, this is what they learn. They learn that tax cuts work. They learn that balanced budgets work. They learn that free enterprise works. They learn that today we have \$169-billion worth of major projects that are planned or underway right here in British Columbia, compared to just seven years ago when it was \$46 billion; \$169 to \$46. They learn that with a strong economy you can expand your health care facilities. You can build new hospitals in Surrey and Kelowna, in Vernon and in Victoria, in Fort St. John and in Vancouver and more. They learn what a strong economy does when they see that we've expanded our universities beyond anything that we've ever imagined in the past.

I think it's important for us to recognize that it's the strong economy that helps build our quality of life. It's the strong economy that gives families a sense of confidence even in uncertain times, and we have to continue to build this economy as we go into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The budget that Finance Minister Carole Taylor laid out in February of 2008 is an important step in securing our future prosperity. It makes us more competitive, and it makes us more productive. It includes you and your communities. It includes your towns and your regions. It calls for income tax reductions so people's paycheques continue to grow so we become an even more attractive jurisdiction for people to come and work. It calls for small business tax reductions so small businesses can continue to flourish in British Columbia. It calls for corporate income tax reductions so that we can continue to have investments that create the flow of opportunities and the job growth that we've had and we've experienced over the last number of years.

It is a budget that for the first time in Canadian history requires that every cent collected from a tax is used to reduce other taxes. The carbon emission tax is the first tax in history that can't be spent on anything except reducing your taxes. It generates \$1.8 billion in new tax cuts over the next five years, including income tax cuts that I've already mentioned, the one that you got in July and the one that you're getting in January.

Some people want to reverse that. Now is not the time to reverse that. We are not going back. We are going forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The climate action



agenda that was important last year at the UBCM is still important, and I think that we all have to recognize that we actually do assume responsibilities for others as we look to the future, and we have to decide: are we willing to take the steps that we need to so that we can provide the future that people deserve?

We committed to reducing our greenhouse gases by 33 percent by 2020. Even today we hear that things are worse than we anticipated a year ago in terms of our climate. Why did we do it? We did it because in our province we already feel the impacts of climate change right here in British Columbia; because our pine forests have been decimated as the direct result of climate change in community after community after community, and family after family after family has to try and deal with that; because of the damage that we've seen in forest fires, that we've seen in flooding, that we've seen related to property damage and drought.

All of those things are there. They're still there. They haven't gone away, and they're not going to go away if we try to ignore them. Someone, sooner or later, has to stand up and say: enough. It's time to take responsibility for our own actions. It's time for us to take responsibility and to contribute to try and mitigate the challenges that are created by climate change.

On August 8, actually I was sitting at the Beijing Olympics and I got an e-mail: "Congratulations, Gord. You're a grandfather."

Those Chinese really know how to put on an Olympic opening, I'll tell you that.

I'm a grandfather now. I bet, looking at some of you, there's some grandfathers and grandmothers out there in the audience. There's people that are mothers and fathers in the audience.

And you know what? This is what I think: I'm probably not going to be here in 2050. I don't want to bet a lot on it, but I'm willing to bet on it. But I can tell you this: I hope the little guy that was born on August 8, 2008 is going to be here in 2050. I want to be able to look at him in his eye as I get older and say I did what was right for you, not what was easy for me but was right for you.

I said this earlier: we are the lucky ones. We are the ones that have the chance to act. We actually run for office asking people to give us the chance to act. We have the chance to do that.

I believe that the course that we've laid out is the right one. I think the bridge we're building to a new, cleaner future is the right bridge. I think it may be difficult to do. But nobody that I've ever met at the UBCM has been afraid to take on hard work, to roll up their sleeves and to get there.

So I want to tell you that not just me, my caucus, our government is going to continue to pursue this because it's right for the economy, it's right for the

environment, it's right for families, it's right for our kids, and it's right for our grandkids.

And in May of next year people in British Columbia will decide whether it's right. They'll have a chance to decide on the direction that they want to go: forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century or back.

I can tell you this: don't you underestimate your ability to do what's necessary to make sure that British Columbia has the future that it deserves.

I've been impressed, as have my colleagues, as we've travelled over this province over the last number of years and met with people in all regions, in all corners, and communities large and small — communities like Heffley and Tahsis and McLeod Lake and Stewart and Falkland and Dease Lake; communities like Logan Lake and Likely and Hedley and Lytton; communities like Coquitlam and Surrey and Burnaby and Victoria and Port McNeill and Port Hardy; communities like Port Alberni and Clinton and Kitimat and Qualicum Beach — if you want, not so much Qualicum Beach.

But, you know, as we talk with people and we go around and we listen to you where you live, and we learn from you about the challenges that we face, one of the great things is we hear from you what some of the solutions might be.

You know, how do we have better access to fresh fruit and vegetables? I walk to the Safeway or the Overwaitea. I don't want to be plugging anybody here. The produce store — I go there to the produce store, and I get fresh vegetables, I get fresh fruit. There are places in British Columbia where they might get fresh vegetables and fresh fruit once a week. Now, those of us who are living in larger urban centres, think what that is like: once a week. I have no idea what day it comes: Wednesday maybe. It comes on Wednesday. How are you going to feel about picking through those vegetables the next Monday? We've got to try and find a way that we deal with that, we're told by communities. I agree with that.

Like Internet access, things that we take for granted. We've connected dozens of communities and dozens of first nations across the province. But there's a difference between connection and having broadband Internet access to get to your home or to your business where you can use it.

Like decent access to resource roads that are properly maintained and crucial to the rural quality of life that we have in British Columbia; like the basic ability to access government assistance programs without having to compile mountains of paperwork and inordinate costs: it's important for us to try and deal with those.

Two years ago we launched what we call the Towns for Tomorrow program, as a way of trying to start to find new ways of meeting some of those challenges. From all that you've told me, it's been pretty successful.

I want to be fair. I noticed that the people that got grants through Towns for Tomorrow thought it was very successful, and the people that didn't - not so much.

But I think the idea was right. So I can tell you today that we intend to expand and extend the Towns for Tomorrow program. It's going to be expanded to include towns with populations under 15,000 people. We're going to increase the Towns for Tomorrow budget for this year by \$10 million, to raise it from \$7 to 17 million, and with legislative approval we will ensure that we have \$20 million available for 2009-10 and 2010-11 to try and ensure that we can connect directly with your needs and that we can identify directly with your leadership.

Whether you want to use this to improve your water quality or heritage preservation or downtown revitalization, or whether you want to make sure that you've got an initiative to try and encourage more physical activities in your community or make your community more integrated or provide for landscaping improvements, that will be your choice.

It's important for you to know that as we do that, we're going to make sure that there is some balance in what's taking place. So for smaller communities under 5,000 the cost sharing will still be 20 per cent for you and 80 per cent from the provincial government. For larger communities between 5,000 and 15,000 the cost sharing will be 25 per cent for you and 75 per cent from the provincial government.

This is another step. We want to learn as we go through this exercise as well because I think that one of the critical things here is to make sure that when there are programs available, they work for you. We try to respond to the issues that you've raised for all of us.

Resource roads are another issue that people have talked to us about pretty regularly, actually, as we've travelled the province over the last number of years. It's something that seems to have eluded our grasp: how we can actually make sure that we have those resource roads so that they're safe for people in rural communities to use them. Well, they're important.

Blair Lekstrom, the Minister of Community Development, has said to me that he wants to take this on and make sure that we do this in a way that works for people. Blair's going to chair a committee of the Minister of Forests and the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources and representatives of the UBCM, and we're going to put in place a framework to make sure that resource roads work for you in your communities.

Many of you have told me that there is a lot of paper involved in dealing with the provincial government. None of you seem to have realized it was part of our

strategy to expand the demand for forest products. But we're willing to recognize with you that it is too cumbersome, it's complicated, and many times you spend an awful lot of time trying to access funds which were put aside for you. Those funds aren't put aside not to invest them; they're put aside to actually invest them.

I know how challenging it is, because I can recall being in one community, and the mayor said to me: "You know, we'd really like to have some assistance in doing this project." I asked him one of the questions that I suggest that we ask when we go around the province. I said, "Have you asked for it?" and he said no. And I said: "We hardly ever send cheques out to people who don't ask for them."

But I think that there is something that is systemic that we have to be aware of, and that is there's so much complication, there's so much paper. One person told me there's 200 pages to get the small grant that they were asking for. One community said to me: "We've put in nine applications, and we're not sure what's happening to which one, where, and why it's happening, etc." Well, that's not what we want to have happen, so we're going to start with the new Towns for Tomorrow expansion program, and Blair is going to develop a new application form, and it's going to be two pages — two pages. I suggest that it asks the tough questions like: what are we trying to do, why are we trying to do it, and what will it cost? Blair I'm sure will think of other questions that he may ask, like: who are you? What town are you from?

Two pages, and here's another part of this. You're going to get an answer within 60 days of whether it's been accepted or it hasn't been accepted. And one more part. If it's not accepted, you're going to be told why it wasn't accepted.

Blair, I hope you're up to this.

I've also asked Mary Polak to pull together a task force comprised of representatives from remote communities, farmers and the ministry to come up with a program that will help us provide produce, vegetables and fresh fruit to remote communities. Here's something I think that's important about this. If we gather together all the remote communities and think about how we do this, we can actually take the economies of scale that will come from that and find a way we distribute that produce. We've got great produce in British Columbia. Why not give it to British Columbians to eat in a cost-effective way?

And, Robert, as the president of the UBCM, I should tell you I've given Mary a very short time to develop this stage of this program. I'm expecting the program to be available for us to consider at the budget in 2009. We're going to need your help to do that. But I think it will make a difference in the quality of life for people around the province.

Another thing you've talked to me about is the challenges with Internet access. As I said, we made the effort to close the digital divide, and literally dozens and dozens and dozens of communities now have Internet access. But there's that last mile that creates a problem for communities. That's the distance from where it's delivered to where you need it, which is in your home and in your business.

You know, we really want all British Columbians to be connected or to have the opportunity to be connected, to have reliable cell phone service, to have online access to distance learning and telehealth services and all the programs that some of us take for granted where we live in urban areas. This is one province, and today I can tell you we're going to deliver on those last-mile connections. It will take us three years, but we're going to use all of the purchasing power of our broad public institutions to bridge the last mile for those who live in rural and remote communities so that you're connected with everybody else in British Columbia, with the country and with the world. It'll be \$5.2 million, but we're going to get there. We're going to provide the same provincial purchasing power to help us expand cell phone coverage in British Columbia as well.

Now, I know that small communities are different than big communities, but there's one thing that all communities have in common. Without a vision, it's tough for us to help them. When communities like Clearwater want to enlist our support in pushing for the designation of Wells Gray Park as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, I want Clearwater to know this: we're going to help them become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and we're going to make sure that they are successful in making sure that Wells Gray Park is known around the world.

When Barriere rises itself up from the fires of 2004 and say that they want to get through the environmental assessment process to build their new industrial park, we're going to help Barriere get through that process — not get around it, not avoid it but get through it so they can get on with building the future for their community that they want.

These things are doable, and what we have to do is create a link between the provincial government and your communities to make sure they happen. So I can tell you today that I'll be establishing a one-stop rural secretariat in community development to help you access federal and provincial programs, to help you succeed with federal and provincial programs, to help you through not just federal challenges but provincial challenges, to make sure you know what's there, know how to put it to work, and we're going to help you put it to work whenever we can. If you need help with applications, we're going to help you make the applications. You don't have to pay for that. We're going to get it done, and we're going to work on your behalf.

Another thing that we hear from British Columbians is, you know, that outside of the major regional health centres it's difficult for people to access some of the health care that's provided to people - rural travel and urban accommodation for

people who have to have medical care given in those regional centres. We did put in place a medical travel assistance plan a little earlier on, but it has not been enough, so I can tell you that George Abbott intends to expand that plan in working with you to try and make sure that people can get to where they need in a timely and in an affordable manner.

Equally importantly, we're going to try and provide people with the accommodation that they need. You know, it's one thing to say you have to go - Say you have a child who needs to go to B.C. Children's Hospital. You have to go with your child. You want to be with your child. It's better for your child and it's better for you. So we're going to establish the B.C. family residence program in British Columbia. It will be a first, where families that must go to B.C. Children's Hospital actually have the support and the accommodation they need so they can be there with their children as their children are being taken care of.

We're going to follow that with appropriate accommodations in other regional centres as well. It's not just about getting to Vancouver. If you're travelling to Prince George from Dease Lake, that's a long, long way. If you're going to a regional centre, we want to be sure that you can; if you need to be with your family, that you can be with them; and the BC Family Residence Program will start that. It will take some time to put those plans in place, but we're going to work with you, we're going to make real improvements, and we're going to put money in place to make sure that it happens. I hope that will work for people in British Columbia.

We want to connect you with medical services. We want to connect you with the world. We want to connect you with British Columbians. Transportation is such a critical and important part of that. It's such a critically important part of our prosperity as a province.

That's why we're opening up the Pacific Gateway.

With massive investments in our ports, airports, border crossings, railways, buses, fast buses, rapid transit, roads and bridges, the evidence of the expansion is all around us. The new Park Bridge in Kicking Horse Canyon has already become a tourist attraction, and it's also becoming an attraction for those who care about how you deliver public projects on time and on budget, delivered 22 months early on budget. The William R. Bennett Bridge across Lake Okanagan, 108 days early, on budget — reflecting the excellence of Bill Bennett. The new Sierra Yoyo Desan Road up in the north and the work that it's brought and the prosperity it's brought to us: record investments in natural gas and oil exploration in the province of British Columbia. The new Pitt River Bridge, the new Sea-to-Sky Highway, the expansions of Highway 97 and the Cariboo connector, the new Canada Line, the new Port of Prince Rupert, new ferries, new terminals.

Actually, you know, it was the UBCM in 2002 in Whistler. I remember laying out that plan, laying out those projects as projects that you brought to us, that you wanted to see happen. I can tell you today it's not a plan; today they're on the ground and they're there for British Columbians.

Just for a moment I should reflect on this. All of those roads, all of that infrastructure has been built by women and men in construction who worked in rotten weather, in rainy weather, in freezing weather, in hot weather. Boy, are we lucky we've got such a great group of B.C. builders building our transportation infrastructure.

Major projects lie ahead. Major and significant projects lie ahead of us: the Gateway Project, the doubling of the capacity of the Port Mann Bridge, restoring transit to the Port Mann corridor for the first time in 20 years. That all will expedite the flow of goods and services: goods and services in our agriculture industry, our forest industry, our mining industry. You name it; it will expedite the flow of goods; it will expedite the flow of our economy as we look to the future.

Do you want to know why Dianne Watts and Kurt Alberts and Clint Hames and George Ferguson and Peter Fassbender all support the Gateway Project and the Port Mann expansion? Because it costs the trucking industry alone about \$1.5 billion a year just to sit in traffic that won't move.

That costs our whole economy, and it costs all of us jobs. It's not just the congestion and the economic costs. It's the health problems that the emissions create. It's also the fuel costs as people sit idling in traffic. And it's the lost time that congestion keeps people away from their families and their communities.

We're going to build that project with a public-private partnership, and we're going to have that partly paid for with tolls. I want everyone to know this: when the partnership concludes in 35 years those tolls are coming off.

That's how we financed the Lion's Gate Bridge. That's how we financed the Coquihalla Highway.

Those toll revenues for the Coquihalla, for example, opened up the interior of the province to new economic opportunities, exceeded beyond our wildest expectations: expansion of Kamloops as a new university town for Thompson Rivers University and a centre of economic growth; Kelowna, our fastest-growing community in the province of British Columbia, with the new University of British Columbia Okanagan, the new Southern Medical School; the new opportunities that are created for the whole Okanagan; Merritt, the country music capital of Canada. Peachland, the Shuswap, Vernon — everyone has benefited from that road. That investment, those tolls were well worth it.

And in spite of all that, there's one thing people have told me and our government for the last two years. They said: "Enough. It's not fair." They've already paid for the highway, and they think its time for those tolls to go. Well, it turns out those people thought that those tolls had paid for the highway. The highway has cost us \$148 million.

How many of you got here driving across the Coquihalla to the UBCM convention? How many of you are intending to take the Coquihalla going home? How many of you are leaving this afternoon? Well, I think you're going to like this. By 1 o'clock this afternoon the tolls on the Coquihalla are going for good. I thought you'd like that. That's an hour away.

Don't leave. I've got more to say. At 1 o'clock this afternoon they're gone. You know, \$848 million was the cost. You may be surprised to know that actually it's estimated that by today about \$845 million will have been paid in tolls. The tolls are gone for good on the Coquihalla.

You know, that's 3.4 million trips on the Coq every year, 3.4 million. Every one of them costs 10 or 20 bucks. A passenger vehicle making a round trip twice a month will save \$480 a year. A commercial truck who makes a weekly round trip will save about \$4,800 a year. It's going to cost us about \$57 million that would go into general revenues on a normal basis.

But, you know, I thought to myself when the world comes to the Olympics in 2010, do we want them to think about the tolls on the Coquihalla? Or do we want them to think about the province of British Columbia? In just a little over 500 days that torch is going to be lit right here in B.C., Canada. When those 3 billion eyes are on British Columbia as we go through that period of time for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, I certainly want them to see our athletes, like these folks, standing on the podium. I want them to hear our national anthem played as we get gold medal after gold medal after gold medal. And I want you to know that this is your Olympics. It's not an Olympics that belongs to Vancouver and to Whistler. It belongs to all of you.

Over the next few weeks you're going to learn a lot about how we're going to make sure that this is an Olympics that you share, that your folks share, that your friends and your families and your kids all share. We're going to provide you with the resources to make sure that your town is dressed for the Olympics just like other towns, Vancouver and Whistler, will be dressed for the Olympics. We're going to make sure that when we have international cultural activities taking place in the Lower Mainland or in Whistler, we're going to make sure that those international concerts are coming to your town, whether you're living in Prince George or Cranbrook or Kamloops or Nanaimo. We're going to try and make sure that cultural Olympiad spreads across our province.



When you hear Bryan Adams sing or Sarah McLachlan sing, you're not going to have to listen to them down in Vancouver; you can listen to them right close to home where you live.

We're going to want our kids to know that they actually can aspire to be great athletes to get one of these medals. Whether it's gold or silver or bronze, whether it's getting on the team, we want our kids to know that we're behind them and they're going to be the best they can be.

And this is what else: When the world comes to British Columbia I think that we'll be defining British Columbia to Canada, to the world. I want them to see you. I want them to see your communities. You know, during the Olympics, there'll be a big international broadcasting centre where the new convention centre expansion is in Vancouver. Thousands of journalists will come from all over the world. You may not know this but I've visited a couple of those. There's a thing that they call beauty shots that take place during the Olympics, so they're going 24/7, right? They're on all the time. Every once in a while there's a gap and they'll take a picture of something.

Did you watch the Beijing Olympics? They were taking a picture Tiananmen Square. And here's a little Olympic story for you: When they took that picture of Tiananmen Square, they had never been allowed on television in China before. It was the most popular picture that they saw in the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

I talked to the head of the international broadcast centre. I said what if we gave you television feeds from all over our province—now, we can't do it for all 180 communities, but we can do it for regions. We can do it where we actually take the beauty shots of this province, not of, you know, the waterfront in Vancouver but—what it looks like in East Kootenays in February of 2010 looking down across—and three of you are very cold evidently—what it looks like from the top of—from Prince Rupert as you look to the east, what it looks like from Terrace, what it looks like from Mt. Washington, what it looks like from Big White in the Okanagan, what it looks like from your part of the province.

We want the world to come here and see *all* of British Columbia and *all* that British Columbia has to offer.

This is what's most important for me, though: I would love the world to come here and discover the people that live in British Columbia. I want them to find a province that's been inspired by the dreams of the generations that follow us, that's inspired to do what's right for the future. I want them to see a province that's known for its healthy and its vibrant communities and for the partnerships that have actually helped create them. I want them to see a province that's a powerhouse of clean energy, renewable energy, of life sciences and social innovation, of forestry and transportation, of mining and agriculture, of tourism

and trade and technology. I want them to see a province where prosperity is shared, where differences are recognized and where services are delivered thoughtfully and effectively.

We all want a province where the strength of our common purpose is enhanced, improved and empowered by the creativity and imagination and the human energy of our citizens.

When the world's televisions tune in to British Columbia in February of 2010, I want them to see your British Columbia. I want them to see the British Columbia that you've built. I want them to see the best place on Earth.

Thank you.