

Premier promoting optimism and jobs at UBCM

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By Premier Christy Clark - UBCM speech

Premier Christy Clark: Thank you very much, Heath. That was a far better introduction than the one I offered, very generous of you. I am very much looking forward to working with you in the year ahead as we chart a course together for British Columbia, communities large and small, and our province as we take our place in this great nation.

Barbara, it has been a pleasure to work with you over the last six months as well. You have done a tremendous amount of work as president of the UBCM. You've been a strong and reasoned voice on behalf of communities. I think you leave big shoes to fill. I have no doubt that Health will fill them, but nonetheless....

And thanks to all of you for the time and commitment that you put into making your communities better places. You do it because you care. You do it because you believe you can make your communities better, which is the essence of public life, really. It's why people step up. People say, gosh, you know, I don't know why anybody gets into politics, and I'm sure they say that to you sometimes too, right before they bug you about why their garbage schedule hasn't been changed yet. But you know, you do it because you care. You do it because you believe you can make your communities a better place.

There are some people with us today who have spent a long time making their communities a better place through public life and will now find ways outside of public life to continue to contribute. Of course, Chris Causton was the mayor of Oak Bay. He served on council since 1987 and the mayor since 1996.

Chris, thank you.

Mayor Bernice Magee of Burns Lake. She served five terms on council and the last three as mayor.

Bernice, thank you.

In Salmon Arm, Mayor Marty Bootsma, who I had the pleasure of sitting with this week, has dedicated 12 years to municipal office, half of them, six of those years, as mayor.

Marty, thank you.

And of course, a special thank you, only because he was my hometown mayor, who I worked with for many years as an MLA and a cabinet minister, Joe Trasolini of Port Moody, who is stepping down after first being elected the same year that I was, in 1996.

Thank you, Joe.

Now, of course, it wouldn't be UBCM if I didn't also acknowledge Gerry Furney. He has been a leader in the town of Port McNeill for six decades, if you can imagine that. I always say to Gerry, you know, Gerry, they're waiting to put up a bronze statue of you, but if you don't resign, they're going to have to bronze you alive.

And I feel very fortunate to have followed Gordon Campbell, who had a much harder job than I do when he took the reins in 2001. He also spent that decade rebuilding the provincial government's relationship with UBCM, making this one of the most important dates on the political calendar.

So thank you for inviting me today. It's been a great week of listening to you and learning about what you're doing and hearing about what's going on in your communities and hearing from the people in your communities on whose behalf you speak so passionately. I met many characters this week. I met with James Baker. I met with George

Burns. I met with James Brown. After meeting with James Brown, I have to tell you I feel good, like I knew that I would. I feel so good that I'm smiling today.

I know that one of my colleagues was with you yesterday, and he was complaining about the fact that I smile so much. I do want to give you an explanation of why I do that. I smile because I'm optimistic. I have hope for the future of British Columbia.

And when I look around this room today, too, I see a lot of smiling faces. Mayor Dave MacDonald, who I met with this week, is smiling because he believes that liquefied natural gas is going to make him the mayor of a boom town in Port Edward. Mayor Kerry Cook from Williams Lake is smiling because there are new gold mines planned and investments from those companies already happening in her community.

I spoke with Mayor John Fraser from Tofino last night, and he is smiling because he believes that the jobs plan and its focus on international education is going to bring many new people and many new dollars to his beautiful little community. And the people of New Hazelton are smiling because a Chinese company bought their chipper mill site and is already looking at buying more property in the community.

Every one of them and every one of you runs for office because you believe in your heart that it is possible to make your communities better. You have hope. You are optimistic. If you didn't believe you could make the future better, why would you run for office? Believing in a better future and coming up with a plan to make that future happen is the essence of leadership. It is at the very heart of why each of us offers ourselves for public office: because we believe; we have hope; we think we can make things better.

That's optimism. That's why we smile. We smile because we look around the corner and we see tomorrow and we think that if we step up, we can make it better than it was today. If you don't believe in the future, if you don't have optimism for what comes next, why would you offer yourself up for public office?

Every single one of you who runs for office does it because you have hope, does it because you know how to smile. It all begins with optimism. And no matter how tough times get, I think we all need to find a way to smile. Wouldn't you agree?

Now, I have been reminded this week about the incredible value that our municipal governments provide. In so many ways, you are the glue that holds communities together. That means you also play a vital role in holding our province and therefore our country together. The fact that the smallest village can carry the same weight as the biggest city at the UBCM means that this is a great forum for listening. It also makes it a great forum for all of us to benefit from the wisdom that rural British Columbia has to offer.

I believe in rural British Columbia, and that was the reason that I appointed Donna Barnett as the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Communities. When Donna gets up at caucus, you should know this. She gets up and she says: "I'm standing here and I'm speaking on behalf of rural British Columbia, and here is what I want you to know." She gets the same kind of reception every time she does, because she has a background in local government as the mayor of 100 Mile, and as you know, she goes about 100 miles an hour on behalf of the communities and needs of rural British Columbia.

We are very lucky to have her, but we are also very lucky to have all of the other MLAs who are here with us today. I hope that my caucus would please stand up, and other MLAs, independents and members of other caucuses, will please stand up and we can give them the round of applause that they deserve. They work so hard, and it's not easy. I'm not telling you anything you don't know.

Now, the thing I have noticed through all of my meetings is how much we have in common, how the things that pull us together are much bigger than the things that pull us apart. We're all trying to look out for the people around us, and that's what I call putting families first. And the reason I care about families is because it is families that do something that government cannot do, something that schools cannot do, and that's instill character. It gives children, future citizens, a sense of morals, a compass to guide them through life, ethics. It's families that build character, and when families build character, they build good citizens, and good citizens build great communities, safe communities, and that's what builds a great province, and that, ultimately, is what makes Canada great. It begins with the work that families do.

Families are as diverse as the communities represented here today, but for all of that diversity, families need the same thing. They need to be able to care for one another. They need to be able to be there in times of crisis, to offer a loving hand for somebody who perhaps isn't doing so well. In First Nations communities they call it a circle of love. Each of us needs a circle of love around us to sustain us and to keep us healthy and hopeful.

And more than anything, if a family wants to be able to do that good job, to put the people that they care about in a circle of love, they need to be able to provide for them. They need to have a job. I am optimistic. As we look forward to tomorrow, I know that our country will benefit from British Columbia stepping up, that we can lead Canada if we are united, if we are confident and if we are optimistic.

Today I'm pleased to announce that we will be doing something that will create jobs and strengthen families in communities across British Columbia. We are going to help local communities open the doors to new or improved recreation facilities in the communities where they live. We are creating a \$30m fund for local governments to apply for capital projects that will improve and promote healthy living in your communities. We will partner with you to invest up to 80% of the funds for recreational facilities. Those projects and their construction will create jobs, but more importantly, it will allow families to spend time together. It will bring communities closer, knit them together, having fun and getting healthier.

You only have to look at Nakusp to see the impact that those kinds of investments make. The province provided \$400,000 to the community, and they transformed their old rink into something way more than a recreational facility. It is now a multipurpose community space. Mayor Karen Hamling has called it the lifeline of their community.

Now, the price tag for this recreational fund is, admittedly, modest, but I am proud of that, because in tough economic times we have to manage our budget just as carefully as all of you manage your budgets, and given the turmoil that we are seeing in the world today, we have to leverage every single tax dollar to maximum effect. There is no question that operating dollars will be tight, but we will continue to make these forward-looking decisions in infrastructure. Investments in communities, in infrastructure are most importantly investments in families. Not only will they promote healthy living, but they will create sustainable communities. I have heard time and again from the leaders in this room and from your citizens as I have travelled the province about the need for these kinds of facilities, particularly in rural British Columbia. It's good for families, as I said, and it builds strong communities.

Today is, by the way, a proud day for me on the matter of health. It is the first day that our government is providing smoking cessation products free to British Columbians who want to kick their habit. The program started tonight. Our first call for a prescription came at 11:58 p.m., and by 9:45 this morning 300 prescriptions had already been filled. Now, I am an ex-smoker of 17 years length, and this is proof that those very small investments can sometimes go a very, very long way.

Now, last week, as you know, we announced our jobs plan, and we have called it Canada Starts Here. We chose the name because we know that British Columbia can pull Canada forward. We know we can lead this country like never before. It means we can take the best of Canada and we can make it better right here in BC. And I mean not just in Vancouver and Victoria and Kelowna. I mean in all parts of British Columbia. Canada starts at Prince Rupert, which is the edge of our gateway. It also starts in Kamloops, where they host over 2,000 international students a year. It starts in the Elk Valley, which feeds Asia's demand, and it starts in the First Nation communities on Vancouver Island who will provide tomorrow's human infrastructure.

It's a plan that is all about bringing that first new dollar to British Columbia, and that means bringing new investment here so that each new dollar can grow and multiply and circulate -- circulate from the initial investment to our value added sectors, to our small businesses and then finally to rec rooms and ice rinks and dinner tables all across the province. That first new dollar will give small businesses the chance to start up and grow, and it will create jobs in every corner of British Columbia.

We will not look inward. We will not be pessimists. We will stand up and we will reach out like never before. And I will be your chief salesperson. I will go and speak to anyone -- anyone -- who expresses an interest on behalf of your communities and make sure they know what every corner of this diverse province has to offer. I will be the best salesman British Columbia has ever had.

We will have hope. We will look toward tomorrow. We will be optimistic. We might even smile. But we will certainly work hard, and we will do that together.

We will ensure that BC's reputation as a safe harbour is well known in international financial markets. Minister of Finance Kevin Falcon is on a plane today to visit Europe's financial centres to share our success story. We have so many unique advantages here, and that's part of our BC story: our creativity, our diversity, our resources, our geography.

Each and every one of your communities has something unique to offer. In the little town of Stewart there are new opportunities that came from a new port. Up and down Vancouver Island the benefits of the organic agrifood sector are only starting to be felt, and in cities like my home town of Burnaby the strength of our digital and creative economies are providing great jobs for young people. I think that's something that Derek Corrigan and I can certainly agree on.

Our jobs plan sets a path to follow to build on that incredible position of strength. The first pillar of our jobs plan is about enabling job creation with a commonsense government that opens doors and makes it a little bit easier for business by getting out of the way whenever we can. Our plan moves aggressively to eliminate one of the big problems that inhibits job growth in BC, and that's delays in permitting approval. We'll invest \$24m across the natural resource ministries over two years in order to eliminate the backlog in key authorization that is preventing projects from proceeding, jobs from being created, your industrial tax base growing in your communities.

Now, the second pillar of our jobs plan is about continuing to build smart infrastructure, and that's why I want to make a pitch for the Evergreen Line today. It is such an important opportunity. It will help so many people in the lower mainland get to their jobs, and it will create new jobs in doing it. It's an important step in relieving congestion. It provides clean air and protects our environment, but it also makes BC a better place for families. And that's why our government is dedicated to seeing the Evergreen Line completed, and that's why we have committed \$583m to do it. Now, I know that Blair Lekstrom has had a lot of good dialogue with the mayors' council, and we await your decision.

The third pillar of the jobs plan is about opening up markets for BC goods. We will focus especially on China and India, where economies are growing and where the middle class is coming to the fore.

By the way, China, as they expand and undertake the biggest urbanization experiment in history, will see the biggest mass migration of humanity ever, as 350 (sic) people move to cities. India will have a middle class that is way bigger than our entire population in just a decade or two. We need to be there. We need to expand those markets in Asia-Pacific. That is the key to our success moving forward.

I would ask you, if you're looking for an example, to go talk to Randy in Princeton. Two hundred and seventy-eight people are now directly employed because of what's going on in Copper Mountain; 278 people have jobs that they can rely on when they want to go out and buy a new truck or when they want to do a renovation in their kitchen. For some of them who may have seen some tough times over the years, it may mean that they don't have to worry about whether or not they're going to be able to put lunch in their child's lunch box every single day of the week.

That mine was shut down in 1996, but they were able to reopen it based on one contract with one company in one Asian country. I met with Princeton Mayor Randy McLean this week, and guess what. He's smiling ear to ear. And that's why opening up those markets is so important to our success as a province and your success as community leaders.

I am proud of the work that you have done in going to open up new markets through our BC-Asia twinning project. Twenty-three municipalities so far have signed memorandums of agreement and gotten a twinning grant of a million dollars to foster new trade relationships with Asia. Those relationships are a crucial part of our gateway across the Pacific.

Now, I've told you why our plan is called Canada Starts Here. But when we say that, we are really talking about each and every one of your communities. Look at the Harmac mill in Nanaimo. They employ 325 people. The cellulose mill in Port Alice employs 385. When some people, some pessimistic people, were thinking about giving up, they refused to throw in the towel. They had hope. They had optimism. They decided that they could make a difference. They came together. They worked on a plan -- a plan that, by the way, was supported by government -- and they implemented it. And in doing so, they defended jobs in their communities. They didn't give up. They believed. They had hope. And they didn't just have hope; they had a plan to back it up.

Those partnerships, though, shouldn't only happen when the chips are down, and that is really the lesson that we can learn from Initiatives Prince George, where community and business leaders are blazing a trail for new opportunities

like their airport expansion. And that is also going to mean new jobs, not just for Prince George and not just for the north, but for the entire province of British Columbia.

One of the foundations for a BC jobs plan has to be creating a strong, skilled BC workforce trained for the jobs that our economy needs today and in the future so that they can get a job where they live and stay close to home.

We're also working on initiatives like our government's partnership with Telus, which will have a direct impact on strengthening BC communities. This partnership will mean better broadband and cellular services all across rural BC and for First Nations communities so that you can capitalize and get the economic and educational opportunities that come from being connected. We've already done upgrades in Lytton, Crawford Bay, Revelstoke, and more are coming to Wynndel and Cape Mudge, which must explain why I'm getting all those great hugs from Jim Abram.

Thank you, Jim. Three so far, and they're not little hugs.

As I said, it's clear that the things that bring us together are much, much bigger and better than the ones that divide us, and our work on your behalf to get a reasonable agreement with the federal government for policing is one of those things. I think Shirley Bond, who's our Solicitor General and our Attorney General -- we just call her the General -- is doing an absolutely terrific job on behalf of British Columbians.

Thank you, Shirley.

So are Dianne Watts and Peter Fassbender and the other mayors and councillors who have contributed and helped us move this along.

I know that the federal government is just as committed as you are and as I am to keeping families safe and communities secure, so I am very hopeful that we can come to an agreement. But we need an agreement that mandates accountability. We need one that protects you and your taxpayers by keeping costs under control. We cannot put property tax payers on the hook for unchecked spending on things that don't put another police officer out on the street and that don't put another criminal in jail.

It'd be a lot easier to just sign on the dotted line and get it over with, but we all have to keep in mind -- and I do keep this in mind on your behalf -- that this agreement isn't for two years or for five years; it's for 20 years. I don't know where you're going to be in 20 years, but I'm going to be eligible for my CPP, so it seems like a long time to me.

We are committed to keeping a strong and steady hand on the wheel when it comes to our finances here in the province. Think about this: think about where the United States is. Their debt-to-GDP ratio is a whopping 72%. In this country, in Canada, it's half of that. In British Columbia, it's half of Canada's. And that's why we've maintained a triple-A credit rating.

Simply put, staying committed to lower taxes and a balanced budget is a key part of our plan to being able to attract investment. It is necessary in order to create jobs. And this approach is critical to maintaining BC's status as a safe harbour in what are increasingly very stormy seas.

Respect for taxpayers is also the reason that we will be creating a municipal auditor general. I can certainly understand and I've certainly heard from many of you why this isn't necessarily a popular idea. But we have one at the provincial level, and he keeps us on our toes. He issued a report today, in fact, that was quite critical. Auditors general ensure the public knows they are getting value for every tax dollar, value-for-money audits that lead to improvements that have literally put money back in the pockets of taxpayers.

The MAG will be able to help 180 communities in British Columbia learn from each other, because when there are a million ways to do the same thing, wouldn't it be nice to know which one, which way could be the best one for you?

The BC government is going to pick up the tab for the municipal auditor general, but as you save the money from the learnings you get from his or her reports, it is your communities that will reap the benefits. I know local governments still have lots of questions, and we're committed to continuing to work with you to answer them.

One of the key changes that I'm making in government is a commitment to open government -- making sure that we have the most open provincial government in the country. As part of that commitment, I've been holding town meetings all across the province, to hear from people directly. The very first one that I did was in Fort St John. I heard in Fort St John about the benefits of shale gas extraction. But when I was there, I also heard some concerns. Listening to those concerns encouraged us to launch a detailed health study in northeast BC.

I have also heard concerns, as I've travelled the province, about gaming grants -- many of them from you. We are committed to an open discussion on how we can create a sustainable, predictable funding formula for the non-profit operations that receive those funds and that provide the glue in the services that hold your communities together -- those non-profit agencies that leverage so much value by using volunteers and by stepping in when they see a gap in the services that your governments, my government and the federal government provide, volunteer organizations which are often the pride of our communities because they give people an opportunity for meaningful contribution and they connect people together.

So Skip Triplett has been travelling the province, looking and listening for input on how we would set up the funding. To me, that's open government in action. It's listening to people. It's seeking your advice about how we can shape programs to make them work better, not for government but for citizens on the ground who live and work and contribute and volunteer in communities. That's the spirit of listening that I've seen and observed this week.

When I met with Mayor Andy Anderson from Ashcroft he told me about an exciting opportunity that they have for tech investment. He believes they are perfect for a tech investment. So I said to him: "Andy, if you find investors who are thinking about coming to your community, you send them my way, because I will meet with them. And as your salesperson, Andy, I'm going to pitch your community, and I'm going to pitch British Columbia."

And I make the same offer to every one of you today. If you have investors who want to come to create jobs in British Columbia and you think they need just a little bit more convincing, send them to me. We can sit down with them together and we can sell them on the benefits of this great province. We can sell them on what's going on in your community and what's going on provincially. Our province is a safe harbour for investment, and we have so many unique advantages. And if you need that help, I'm telling you today, I've got your back.

We have also got the most robust open data platform of any province in the country by making 2,500 data sets fully available to the public. It was Surrey, Langley, Vancouver that led the way on that, before the province ever went ahead and did it.

Now, you'll notice that our plan is about defending the jobs that we have, as well as creating new ones. That's really important to remember. Our province is a place of relative economic calm, but we are surrounded by economic turmoil. Our best friend and closest neighbour, just down south in the US, is grappling with high unemployment, high debt, and just last week we saw consumer confidence in the US stagnate at a two-year low.

But Kitimat has suffered some tough times, has weathered some tough times in the last little while, and they know how to come back. They know how to come back from difficult losses in their community, as many of you do, because it has been tough times -- global markets sell-offs, escalating debt.

I think in British Columbia we've learned that high-debt policies won't work for tomorrow and they won't work for today. And if you want to know about how that works, you can go ask anybody who lives in Greece. You can go ask anybody who lives in the Euro zone. You can go ask anybody who lived through the 1990s right here in beautiful British Columbia. Businesses were lost. Families' dreams went up in smoke. And communities lost so much when 50,000 people left the province, just trying to find a job.

Small communities were hit particularly hard, because when a mill shuts down, it's not just the mill; it's the small businesses that depend on it. It's those coffee shops on Main St. It's those people whose small businesses depended on the income of those millworkers to be able to survive.

But we need to be looking for new opportunities, and those new opportunities are emerging all across the province. Kitimat is that great example. Kitimat and the Haisla First Nation are looking at liquefied natural gas as a huge opportunity. They show us that the challenges ahead are ones we can overcome. So that's why we are taking a different approach. We are focused on going out to the world and finding those opportunities, finding those new investments that will help improve life here at home.

But this plan cannot be successful if we try to go it alone. Our government needs to work with the UBCM. We need to work together to identify those creative ways to defend and create jobs all across the province. Implementing this plan is my central mission as your Premier. So I say: come join me. Let's do this together. We're all in politics for the same reason: because we want something better for our communities.

Let's work together to make British Columbia better, because this can't be a plan for just one level of government, and it can't be a plan for just one political party. It has to be a plan for all of us to come together, to challenge ourselves, to challenge ourselves to make BC and your communities the most competitive place in which to do business, not by compromising environmental safeguards, but by being smart, by being responsive, by being nimble.

We have such advantages here in British Columbia. We are so blessed. We have our proximity to the biggest markets, the fastest-growing markets on the globe. We have an incredibly diverse population that weaves our families together across the Pacific Ocean. We have world-class infrastructure, which we are continuing to build out. We have our sound fiscal fundamentals, which make us a safe harbour for investment. And we have a wealth of natural and intellectual resources that the world needs. We must build on this position of strength, and never, never has that been more important than now.

I am a proud Canadian, and I'm even prouder because I know that BC will be leading Canada into the next century. We will invite our fellow Canadians to join us and tell them, tell the world that Canada does indeed start here. This is a unique moment in our history. It's a chance for us to do more than we ever have for this entire nation. It is a chance to grasp our opportunity to lead this country. Canada starts here because we are at the Pacific edge of the nation. We are literally facing Asia and the fastest-growing markets in the world. We are facing a generational opportunity, and we are going to lead Canada into the next decade.

This is our time. This is our chance to lead. This is our moment, so let's take it. Let's be hopeful. Let's be optimistic as we tell the world that Canada -- Canada -- starts right here.

Thank you.