

Text of Premier Christy Clark's Keynote Address to UBCM

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VICTORIA - Premier Christy Clark made the following speech to the Union of BC Municipalities today:

Check against Delivery

Thank you very much. I'm just delighted to be here with you today, and I do want to start with a huge thank you to all of you, many of whom I've met with over the last week since you've been here in Victoria.

I don't want to just thank you for serving in public office. I want to thank you for all that you do for your communities because all of us are called to serve because we care about our communities.

Wherever we come from on the political spectrum, whatever motivates us to decide to run for office in the first place, we do it for the right reasons. We do it because we want to make our communities better. And that is hard work.

I certainly know that for many of you who serve in local government that's the hardest kind of work because it means phones ringing at 2 a.m., it means dealing with some of the most difficult issues you'll find in a very personal way, and I don't think that people in local government get thanked enough for that.

So on behalf of all of the people in the province, all of the ones that you represent, and all the ones that I represent, I do want to say thank you for the work that you do.

I want to say thanks to Heath. It's been a pleasure to work with you over the last year. He says a mighty weight has been lifted from his shoulders, and, of course, a mighty weight has now been put on Mary Sjostrom's shoulders. I'm very much looking forward to working with you, Mary, over this next year.

You know, the thing about Mary is she's a real fighter. My personal example of that is when I saw her on Wednesday night. We talked about the multiplex in Quesnel, which is something she's been working towards for a long time. I told her how pleased that the Province was able to participate in that to the tune of about a \$4 million grant, and Mary said: "Yes, Christy, we are very grateful for that \$4m, and of course, we're still waiting for the other \$2m to \$4m to come."

The woman just doesn't give up. She doesn't give up behalf of Quesnel, and she certainly won't give up on your behalf either. She is a real fighter. So, Mary, welcome. I'm very much looking forward to the next year.

And I do want to acknowledge the members of our government caucus who are here today, who understand the issues that you face in local government better than most, because ten served as mayors, 13 served as councillors, five served on local boards. They are intimately familiar with the issues in local communities. I'd like to ask all of them to stand up for a round of applause for all of the work that they do on behalf of the people of British Columbia.

I want to give a shout out to Bill Bennett, as well, our new minister for communities. Of course, you know that he's been a very, very strong voice on behalf of the province. He has spent 11 years as an MLA, four of them in cabinet out of those 11 years.

Bill is a guy you want on your side. He's an unflinchingly honest voice. It hasn't always made his job easy, and he certainly hasn't been afraid to say what he thinks, even though sometimes that's meant he's found himself in a new seat in the Legislature. The reason I chose him for this job is because we do want to hear the honest truth, the unflinching truth, from local communities.

Now, since I spoke with you last year, many of the communities that you represent have seen some tough times. Of course, Luke Strimbold is with us from Burns Lake, and Luke's community has seen some tough times. So have the folks in the Kootenays and Johnson's Landing. So have other communities as well.

And I don't want to forget, either, the people of the great town of Sicamous. Darrell Trouton, who I met with recently when I was up to visit, has been dealing with some very challenging floods in his community, and now his water supply is under threat. Darrell, I want you to know this, because Bill has asked me to make sure we set this right. I know you need that water supply fixed, and we are going to help you do it.

Last year I also talked to you a little bit about our jobs plan. It was an economic plan that we have set out for the province. Over the last year we have been putting that plan to work in every corner of our province. It has two priorities: creating jobs and making life more affordable for families.

After a year, here are the results:

- We are number one in job growth in Canada, even ahead of Alberta.
- We are up 18 per cent in new investments over one year with over \$80 billion currently underway in your communities.
- We've got the notice of work backlogs for mining by 90 per cent helping industry grow by 20 per cent in value in one year. That's up \$8.6 billion.
- We've made a \$75-million investment in skills training so that British Columbia kids will be the first in line to get those jobs when they come open.
- We've done three trade missions to Asia that have garnered \$2 billion in new deals from those missions alone.

And despite the global economic uncertainty, our plan is also working to make life a little bit more affordable for families.

And here again, we've seen some results.

- We raised the minimum wage to put \$4,000 extra per year into people's pockets.
- We're implementing targeted tax relief for seniors, for young families and for first-time new home buyers.
- We're working to make government less expensive by cutting the proposed hydro rate increase in half and by cutting the Port Mann Bridge tolls in half for the first year.
- And most importantly, we are leaving more money in people's pockets by holding the line on provincial taxes so that we still have the lowest personal income taxes of any jurisdiction in this country.

Those are all things that will help us protect the middle class, and further, they will help us make sure that more people have a chance to join the middle class ... the middle class that has built this country.

And we are on the right track.

Our plan is built on the belief that this truly is, as I said last year, British Columbia's moment. This is a unique moment in time where British Columbia has exactly what Canada and the rest of the world needs to build, and the plan is called 'Canada Starts Here'.

So let's look at what that really means today in your local communities.

Ellis Ross from the Haisla, Joanne Monaghan from the city will tell you that Canada certainly starts in Kitimat where we are seizing the opportunity for more than a trillion-dollar liquefied natural gas export industry.

Frank Leonard will tell you that Canada starts in Saanich where Camosun's interurban campus will be upgraded so that BC students can be first in line for those shipbuilding jobs when they come open.

Gregor Robertson will tell you it starts in Vancouver, which is now a world leader in digital media and they are set to take advantage of all those new grads that are going to come from the new centre for digital media.

Mary Giuliano will tell you that it starts in Fernie where steelmaking coal from the Elk Valley is fuelling the largest urbanization in human history that's underway right now in China.

On Tuesday I saw Pete Weeber from New Hazelton. Pete said to me: "Christy, last year you talked to me about how Canada starts here, and I need to tell you a story that happened this week. I woke up with my phone ringing, and it was people in town who were upset that they were all being kept awake by all these helicopters that were flying around. You know what it

was? It was the sound of the surveyors for the natural gas line that Spectra wants to put through in the nearby area."

Pete Weeber will tell you that Canada starts in New Hazelton where the noise of helicopters is music to his ears, because the noise of helicopters is the sound of jobs.

Some communities have also struggled. Some of those communities you represent here, and one of those communities is Port Edward.

Port Edward over the years, as Dave MacDonald tells me, has seen some tough times, and we all know that that's true, particularly in the northwest. But Port Ed is on the comeback trail because people there don't give up, and neither do we. We've got a plan, and it is delivering.

Dave MacDonald and his council came to see me last year. The Port Edward Elementary School was closing, and they knew they had little hope of attracting new families to their community versus Prince Rupert if their kids didn't have a school close to home. So Dave came to me with a plan. He said they needed three new classrooms and a shared library and that they needed some help with it.

Dave, we found that half-million dollars that you needed because I believe in our plan and I knew that it would deliver results for your community. I believe in the future of Port Ed. So, since that last UBCM, Petronas has announced that they want to come to Dave's town of Port Edward. That's 4,000 construction jobs and 400 to 500 permanent jobs in the community. Our plan is delivering.

Our plan is delivering for Port Ed, and Dave delivers too. When Dave told me last year he needed this to happen, he said, "I will dance with you, if you get me the money," and I'm pleased to say that on Wednesday in my office Dave and I had a chance to dance. Dave's a good dancer.

That is exactly the kind of investment from government, and it's just like the investments of \$30 million I announced last year for the community recreational program that depend on a thriving private sector.

That is what our plan is all about, because when the private sector is thriving, people are working, and when people are working, government has the economic capacity that it needs to be able to make sure that families have what they need, and also to make sure that we're able to keep taxes down.

So today I want to make four announcements that will continue to drive our plan forward and that will keep our economy strong.

The first is this. Within our capital plan - and I want to be clear, this is within our capital plan. My government is going to be accelerating some projects in your communities. Today, I am announcing a total of \$207 million for projects that we can get started this year, new investments in schools, in roads, hospitals, housing projects and more. By using taxpayers' money wisely, we

have been able to get those projects going faster, helping support thousands of direct and indirect jobs in construction over the next four years.

They'll be projects like expanding the 16th Avenue interchange in Surrey, improving K-to-12 public schools in communities of Nanaimo, Campbell River, Houston, Surrey, Richmond, Maple Ridge, Mission and West Vancouver. Over the coming days and weeks we'll be announcing these projects and more in your communities all across the province.

But let me reiterate this, these are new projects, but this is not new money. It is money that we saved because we've pinched pennies; and I am very, very proud of that.

Now we have a chance, because we were careful, because we were diligent and disciplined, to reinvest that money that we saved in the community infrastructure that is so vital to holding families together all across the province.

Speaking of pinching pennies, here is the second announcement. You know we have been in contract negotiations with our public sector unions, the people who have worked so hard to serve British Columbians for some time now. The basis for those negotiations has been our cooperative gains mandate.

Now, that mandate recognizes that we are in some very uncertain times here and that any wage increases, as I have always said, must be found through savings within existing budgets. They cannot come through an increased deficit, they cannot come through cuts to service, and they cannot come through increases to people's taxes.

Yesterday you know that the Minister of Health announced that we have reached a tentative agreement with B.C. nurses under cooperative gains, and today I am able to announce that we have also reached two more tentative agreements. The first is with resident doctors, and then late yesterday we also reached an agreement with the BCGEU, representing 26,000 direct government employees. They will be receiving modest wage increases without increasing taxes.

It's been a very challenging mandate and negotiation, as I'm sure you can appreciate, and I do want to take a moment to acknowledge Darryl Walker, the president of the BCGEU, who I understand is with us today. Darryl and his team, along with our negotiators, worked very, very hard to make this work. I acknowledge it hasn't been easy, but Darryl and the other negotiators have shown that agreements can be done. We can treat public sector employees fairly at the same time that we are protecting the province's finances.

Now, third, as we all know, B.C. is Canada's gateway to Asia and also to the fastest-growing economies in the history of humanity. More than \$22 billion has already been dedicated to one of the biggest transportation projects in Canadian history.

But there is still more to do. There are still bottlenecks in the Pacific Gateway.

Today I am announcing two new transportation initiatives. The first will deal with a longstanding challenge many communities have faced and that many drivers continue to endure.

I have been to Golden. I have been to Salmon Arm. I have been to Revelstoke. I have travelled the highway that links them, and I have met with mayors and councillors along the way, and I have heard your concerns. So here is my commitment to you. We will accelerate our efforts to complete the four-laning of the Trans-Canada Highway between Kamloops and the Alberta border.

To make that happen, in addition to the \$141 million from our current three-year service plan, my government is allocating another \$509 million over the next 10 years for a total of \$650 million. We'll work with the federal government to find matching funds.

Let's turn that remaining 280 kilometres of two-lane highway into a complete four-lane highway for the benefit of those communities, for the benefit of all British Columbians and, frankly, for the benefit of all Canadians who want to be able to access our coast. Let's get the job done.

Now, for those of us who live in the lower mainland, there's another little problem that they call a bottleneck in the Pacific Gateway, and that's the George Massey Tunnel. The Massey Tunnel was built in 1958.

Over 80,000 people move through that tunnel every day, and it is a huge cause of traffic congestion. It drives people crazy and it drives business out of our province. So, starting today we are going to sit down with communities, with mayors and begin planning the replacement, long overdue, of the George Massey Tunnel.

It will be a major project. It'll take up to 10 years to plan and deliver, but with the population of communities served by the Massey Tunnel growing by 300,000 people over the next 20 years, we do not have a moment to lose. Starting today we'll begin engaging Delta, Richmond and other communities to determine what a replacement will look like.

Now, I talked to you today a little bit about our uncertain economic times, and it's certainly just as uncertain as it was a year ago when we last met. We've all been reading the papers and seeing what's going on in Europe and the United States, and I think it's pretty obvious to most of us that it's not going to change dramatically any time soon. It may very well be the new normal for all of us.

And that is why we have to stick to our plan, because while we've seen another year of economic turmoil since we launched the BC jobs plan, British Columbia has nonetheless charted a safe course through that, created more than 51,700 net new jobs.

Unemployment in British Columbia is down. Investment is up. Jobs are up. We are stable and we are growing.

With all that's going on around us, more British Columbians are working today than ever in our history, and we are well on our way to becoming the economic engine of our country.

Just look at natural gas. This really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for all of us. Natural gas prices are way down in North America, and you know that that's carved a big hole in our provincial budget. So we need to diversify our markets.

We need to make sure that we are not dependent on just one customer and captive to just one market. We need to liquefy natural gas. We need to ship it to Asia where prices are higher, where economies are transitioning to cleaner energy and where the investment interest in British Columbia is incredible.

If we get it right and we stick to our plan, this is going to be a trillion-dollar opportunity for our province over 30 years. That's a lot of health care and education. It's a lot of highways and bridges and airports and ports. It's a decade of low taxes and it's a generation of economic opportunity for families.

Now, if you live in the northeast or if you live in the northwest, you see that plan unfolding right in front of you every single day. But what if you live in Sicamous? Well, ask Greg Kylo, because Greg owns a houseboat manufacturing company that was heavily affected by the American downturn. He had the painful job of laying off many of his employees in the aftermath of that downturn.

But then he saw an opportunity. He decided he would diversify and would start to produce worker accommodation units for oil and gas camps. He was able to hire back almost all the employees he'd laid off, and now he employs 100 production workers. He is the biggest employer in Sicamous. And when Liquefied Natural Gas really takes off and those worker camps really get going, I'm hoping that Greg is going to be employing 250 people in Sicamous. Greg's story is an example of how natural gas activities all over the province will affect us all over the province. They may be removed by hundreds of kilometres, but it really does connect us all.

Now, last, I want to talk to you about this because there are some big environmental issues facing us here in British Columbia, many of which you've talked about over the last few days. In particular I want to talk to you about the transportation of heavy oil from Alberta to our coast.

Our government has taken a tough, principled and absolutely consistent stand; we have said that, as of now, the risks of heavy oil far outweigh the benefits that our province would see. Right now it's a bad deal for British Columbia. So we've set out five bottom lines that must be met before we will consider allowing any heavy oil pipelines to go through British Columbia. And we've been consistent in applying those five criteria, not just to the Northern Gateway pipeline but also through projects that might go to Vancouver harbour.

And I want to be clear about this because, yes, we do deserve our fair share of the benefits, but there is no price that we can put on our environment. There is no amount of money that can make up for an unacceptable risk when it comes to our ocean, our coast and our land. I have never seen a seagull wash up on the coast covered in natural gas.

On Monday I'm headed to Calgary to talk to the people of Alberta and meet with the premier, and I'm sure it's going to be an interesting trip. I do have an RCMP detail coming along. I'm going, though, because I want to be sure that Albertans understand how much we here in British Columbia cherish our environment and that they understand exactly where we are coming from

on this issue. I want them to know that if B.C.'s conditions are not addressed and met, the Enbridge pipeline will not be built, period.

So let me conclude with this, with the thanks to you, again, for all of the work that you do and for the warm welcome you've offered me this week. I really have no doubt that we are on the right track, and your hard work, our partnership through all levels of government, is a big part of that success.

We are all fighting for the same thing - a strong, job-creating economy that's going to sustain the families and the communities that weave us all together. The path to get there is what differentiates my government.

We believe in economic development. We believe in resource development.

We believe in companies like Yellowhead Mining in the North Thompson, and that's why we're working with Hydro to connect them to the power that they need.

We believe in tourism opportunities in Nakusp, and that's why we've doubled the number of people at our trade missions in Asia, and that's why we're going to bring some of them over to Nakusp, so they can see the opportunities, so that they can sell it to investors in Asia.

We believe in opportunities up the Robson Valley for clean energy and IPPs. That's why we're working to help make it possible for those communities to realize their vision.

Yes, we are living in a world of economic turmoil, but we are stable and growing in British Columbia and that is because we believe in saying yes to opportunities.

We believe in responsible natural resource development. We believe in building the infrastructure that will allow our economy to grow. We believe in creating and funding some of the world's greatest post-secondary institutions that will make BC a world leader in high-tech innovation.

We believe in keeping taxes low, in keeping investor confidence high and in balancing our budget. And let me be clear, if you are serious about balancing your budget, you believe in a balanced budget law because if you don't have a rule that makes deficits the exception, then deficits become the rule and balanced budgets become the lucky exception.

Our plan is making British Columbia the economic engine of Canada, but we will only be that economic engine if we all continue to work together as we have. Despite the tough challenges, ladies and gentlemen, because of all of your hard work, because of all of the hard work that your citizens put in, Canada really does start right here.

I look very much forward to seeing all of you again next year and reporting again on the progress that we are making together.

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