

Speech to the Union of B.C. Municipalities



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

It's great to be here on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

We've had a productive time with all of you this week – my caucus and cabinet are here – raise your hands, so people can see you!

I want to give particular kudos to Selina Robinson, my Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing, for driving our first UBCM.

This is our chance to hear from you about all the good work local government is doing across B.C.

I'm excited and humbled to be here. Our government is ready to get to work building a better B.C., and partnering with local governments to get it done.

Working Together

We need to come together, all levels of government, to support and empower communities. When we do, we can transform lives and help people when they

need it most.

When Mayor Lyn Hall in Prince George and Arjun Singh in Kamloops took in wildfire evacuees with open arms and open hearts...

When the Canadian Armed Forces, and firefighters from across the country joined our emergency responders on the front lines...

When the Ashcroft Indian Band came together to support people who lost their homes, including two women who fled on foot to escape a fast-moving fire...

And when people like John Ranta, and the Cache Creek council, step up with strong and stable leadership for a town ravaged by wildfires and floods...

That's community.

I want to thank every person who worked tirelessly to get us through B.C.'s worst-ever fire season: firefighters, emergency responders, the federal government, the Red Cross, First Nations leaders, and local governments.

We came through this because we worked together.

In my first week as Premier I travelled to Ottawa, where I met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

We talked about the wildfires, and the urgent issues facing B.C. including the opioid crisis, housing affordability and softwood.

Mr. Trudeau didn't put up roadblocks, and he didn't argue about who should take responsibility. He simply asked how the federal government could help.

I said: you can back us up when we fight for B.C. jobs in the softwood lumber dispute. And they did.

I travelled from Ottawa to Washington, to fight for B.C. workers whose jobs and livelihoods are on the line.

Together – B.C. and Canada – we have a strong and united voice on softwood.

The US Lumber Coalition continues to frustrate a negotiated settlement. B.C. will not sign away our interests. If the US wants to go to court, so be it.

We're fighting hard for a fair deal, and not just any deal, but one that's good for B.C. workers, for forest towns and our economy. There's no limit to what we can achieve when we work together.

We can keep our economy growing, creating good jobs and opportunity for people, deliver the services communities count on like health care, education, childcare and transportation, and address the urgent problems facing families today.

Year after year, many of you have come to UBCM with ideas to fix problems and make life better. But you were met by a provincial government that put up roadblocks to progress for communities.

We're going to change that.

I want you to know: You have a partner in this government. One that will listen to you, support your solutions, and join you at the table with ideas to make communities better.

Together, we will grow B.C.'s prosperity in all regions of our province, and find solutions to the difficult and urgent challenges facing people today.

Wildfire Recovery

Starting with the wildfires in the B.C. Interior.

While the provincial state of emergency has been

lifted, we must remain vigilant.

There are fires still burning. Slowly but surely, relief is on the way.

After three months, evacuation orders and alerts are over. We're looking optimistically towards recovery. And we're working with villages, towns and cities to help.

The wildfires carry a tremendous cost.

From the treasury: over half a billion dollars.

On the land: 1.2-million hectares has burned.

And for people, who depend on forestry, agriculture, tourism and small business: a devastating loss for local economies and our communities.

It will take time to rebuild. That work has started. And we will come back even stronger than before.

Together, with the federal government, we're helping B.C. ranchers and farmers, with fencing and animal feed...

We're helping small businesses with emergency grants...

We're reaching out to tourism operators ...

And to the forest industry, which powers so many of our rural communities.

This is my commitment to the people of the Interior:

Our government will continue to support you, long after the fire season is over. And we will continue to work with you to figure out how we can best support your recovery.

I've asked my deputy to create a cross-ministry team to advance urgent initiatives to strengthen fire-devastated communities.

Let's get to work creating jobs by salvaging fire-damaged timber.

We're going to support tourism operators who need help building next season's business.

I've heard from many of you about capital projects we can move forward on. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to it.

We're in this with you.

Action on Overdoses

Communities across B.C. are on the front lines of another crisis.

The overdose epidemic is a public health emergency, and like a wildfire, it deserves an urgent response.

We've lost 876 people to overdoses so far this year. These are our sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters.

If today is an average day, overdoses will claim another four lives. Most of them will die alone. Many of them Indigenous people.

This is not a just Downtown Eastside problem. The opioid epidemic has touched every community. It affects young and old, rich and poor. People from all walks of life.

We have to tackle this problem with compassion and understanding. And we have to work together to save lives.

One of our first acts as government was to create a stand-alone ministry of Mental Health and Addictions -- a single point of accountability, focus, and action on the overdose crisis.

If someone is in trouble, we need to be there to help.

Starting today we're taking additional steps to respond to the overdose crisis.

First, we're launching a new community crisis innovation fund to help regions that have been hit the hardest. These funds will support innovative new strategies to save lives.

Second, we need to make sure help is there for people when they're ready to start on a path to recovery. Which is why we've opened the doors to expanded opioid treatment at centres in Surrey and Maple Ridge.

And we'll open new rapid access clinics in Burnaby, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Mission and Langley to better meet demand.

Third, we will launch a public awareness campaign to help prevent future deaths and reduce the stigma of addiction.

And finally, we'll give police the tools to fight fentanyl in our neighbourhoods, including more officers and new dedicated anti-trafficking teams.

This is a difficult and complex problem. Local governments are working around the clock to respond. You shouldn't have to face it alone. The province is stepping up to help.

We will make progress together.

Housing Affordability

The same is true for housing affordability. I know this is an area of urgent focus and attention at UBCM this year. And rightly so: the housing crisis affects people of all incomes, in every corner of the province.

Families are spending more and more money on a safe place to live, but with run-away housing costs

and near zero vacancy rates, working people are forced to leave their communities because the prices are too high.

For many years, local governments have looked to the province for leadership. And for many years, the province did not meet its obligations.

Our government is making different choices. We're ready to work with municipalities and the federal government to create housing for people.

It's a huge task. It won't happen overnight. But the only way we're going to do it, is if everyone in this room steps up and takes ownership of the solution.

Together, our government will help create 114,000 homes for people including co-ops, affordable, rental and market options. Homes for regular people, who want a place they can afford that doesn't cost them half their paycheque.

We need to work together – with developers, the non-profit sector and co-operatives – along with all levels of government to build the homes people need and make our communities even better places to live and work.

Building supply of affordable homes is only one part of the equation. We need a housing market that's accessible to hard-working people who want to buy a home, while discouraging those who are only interested in turning a profit.

Our government is working on ways to curb speculation in the marketplace. We will have more to say about that in the months ahead.

Our government is also taking quick action to help people who do not have a home.

In our September Budget Update we funded 2,000 new modular homes, with 24/7 staffing and support, because people won't feel safe and secure without a roof over their heads.

Modular homes are self-contained and can be built and moved quickly, which means homes could be in place in months, instead of years.

We're looking for municipal partners to bring these modular units to your communities.

We're getting started in the City of Vancouver, where 600 of these units will be placed. I'm happy to see Mayor Robertson and council step up so quickly to get these units built.

But homelessness isn't just a Vancouver problem. It's in the suburbs, it's on the Island, and in rural B.C.

We're bringing modular homes to Surrey and Smithers -- and any other local governments who want to work with us.

We know there's a need. Let's work together on the solution.

Right after this session, I invite you all to go to Robson Square and check out the modular home that's on display.

Take a look around, and see how this might be part of your solution back home. And let's work together to make it happen.

We are all here to help people.

Create strong, vibrant communities, better schools and hospitals, good jobs, a clean environment, and a bright future for our kids.

For too long, you didn't have a partner in the province. We're stepping up, and ready to work with

you to build a better B.C. for everyone.

We're ready to partner with you to make smart investments in transit and transportation, to get people moving.

We're ready to deliver the services communities count on, like housing and affordable childcare for families.

We're ready to tackle the challenges of climate change, and protect our environment and our coast.

You can count on us to strengthen traditional industries like forestry and mining, the backbone of our economy, where innovative technologies are helping us to expand market reach and stay competitive.

And we will make smart investments to keep our province growing.

The announcement by Fortinet, a cyber security firm based in Burnaby, to hire 1,000 more highly-skilled workers is a testament to the confidence in our business climate and in B.C.'s future.

DP World Canada's investment in the Fairview Terminal expansion in Prince Rupert, will boost our shipping capacity by 50 per cent.

Major global retailers Uniqlo and Muji have opened stores in Burnaby.

Just a few blocks from here, the new office of ZEE Studio International has set up operations to hire local, skilled TV and digital media talent.

And we will make sure every region of the province has a chance to be a part of our emerging economy.

Which is why the Province is proud to support community-driven, collaborative bids to host a new Amazon HQ2.

Like the one that Metro Vancouver is putting together.

The Province has rolled up its sleeves and is working with Metro municipalities, the private sector and agencies like TransLink and YVR to put forward a bid that Amazon will want to seriously consider.

It better be good – because the Mayor of Langford, working with communities in the Lower Island, is putting in a bid, too!

Amazon already has a large presence in Metro Vancouver with 1,300 people working in web services and e-commerce.

A headquarters of the scope Amazon is talking about would generate up to \$50 billion in investment and create up to 50,000 new family-supporting jobs for people here in B.C.

These opportunities will be open to all British Columbians with the skills and the talent to succeed, and create economic benefits for other regions in B.C., too.

Our future is as bold and as bright as we want it to be.

Together, we can build a better B.C. that works for everyone, where no one is left behind.

After a week together here at the UBCM convention, meeting with people from Kelowna, Terrace, Merritt, Surrey, Williams Lake, Ashcroft, Fort St. James, Fort St. John, Dawson Creek, 100 Mile House, the Cariboo Regional District and the Nisga'a Peoples...

I'm struck by the resilience of our province, and the commitment and creativity of our people.

From the Northwest to the Kootenays, to the North East and the Interior, the Lower Mainland, our Islands and our Coast...

I am humbled and honoured to have the opportunity to lead a government that stands ready to work with you to make B.C. even better.

We're ready to get started.

Let's build that future, together.