

**CAROLE JAMES, LEADER OF THE BC NDP**  
**UBCM CONVENTION ADDRESS**  
**September 27, 2007**

Thank you so much for the warm welcome. It's wonderful to be here.

Let me start by thanking Brenda and the UBCM Executive for a great year. You've made an enormous contribution to British Columbia.

And my congratulations to Susan Gimse. I look forward to working with you over the coming year.

I also want to recognize members of my caucus who are here today, many of whom are spending the week with you.

In particular, I want to acknowledge my local government critic, the MLA for Cariboo South, Charlie Wyse. Many of you know Charlie well. Landslide Charlie we call him for his massive one vote victory on election night.

A former Williams Lake City Councillor, Charlie is a passionate advocate for local government and a powerful voice for rural BC. He also happens to be one heck of a guy.

I also want to introduce another member of my caucus, the MLA for Skeena, Robin Austin. This summer, I appointed Robin as my critic for rural issues. And he's doing a great job for communities that are being left out.

Places that aren't benefiting from mega-projects and special deals. Where mills are closing and raw logs leaving. Where ferry fares are skyrocketing. And schools closing. Where health care is getting worse and what there is, is farther away than ever.

As I travel this province my message to rural BC is this: You produce the wealth. You should be getting a fairer share of prosperity.

Robin and our rural caucus are going to make that case over and over again until the government listens. And they are joined by a talented and diverse group of opposition MLAs from every corner of BC.

A new NDP. Grounded in their communities. Guided by core values. And in the mainstream of British Columbia.

Like me, every member of my caucus understands that real politics is local.

Top-down decisions are the way of the past. Bottom-up, community-driven solutions, are the way forward for our province.

And the NDP under my leadership has consistently stood up for local government.

Opposing legislation that downloads costs. Fighting hard when the government takes away your powers on everything from independent power production, to the construction of mega-projects, to control and input over public transit.

The provincial government shouldn't decide on its own what's in the provincial interest and what's not. One level of government doesn't have a monopoly on wisdom. It's the people we all represent who count. It's the people of BC who are the provincial interest.

You are the public servants closest to the people we serve. The community leaders who translate provincial and federal decisions into reality in our everyday lives.

And so, for example, when the province signs a trade agreement with Alberta that affects the way you do business, they owe you a straightforward explanation about what it really means.

I want to congratulate you for your persistence in demanding those answers about TILMA from this government and for the strong stand you've taken at this Convention.

And I have to say I'm disappointed that the Minister of Economic Development continues to insist that the UBCM is simply misinterpreting the agreement.

I've demanded that the government put the entire agreement before the Legislature, so we can debate those issues publicly. And today, I again call on the Premier to bring the TILMA agreement forward for a full public debate.

You deserve answers. And we will work with you to get those answers.

Let me assure Mr. Campbell that there is nothing to be frightened by.

Accountability isn't a four-letter word. It's the most important ingredient in our democracy. But accountability comes with a price: to actually be accountable.

People don't want to be lectured to or spun. They know government can't be all things to all people and solve every problem.

But they expect government to be a force for good. This year's UBCM Convention theme and agenda captures that so well.

We are living in a "Climate of Change". But we have to ask ourselves: are we doing what we can to secure the future for every citizen?

The BC of my childhood was a great place to grow up.

It's where I learned my core values that brought me to politics – that everyone matters and no one should be left out.

Last year at this Convention I spoke about the homelessness crisis throughout British Columbia.

Unfortunately not much has changed. It continues to be a powerful symbol of what's happening in our province.

As the economy races forward, the glue that keeps us one society – one province – is coming unstuck.

We see it in the misery of growing poverty – especially among children.

In the growing income gap between the wealthy and everyone else. In gridlocked emergency rooms and ambulance shortages in rural communities. In congested highways and transit shortages. And we see it in climate change that threatens to wipe out so much of our forests and the foundation of our prosperity.

British Columbia is not one society with one future. It's rapidly becoming a divided society on so many different paths.

And in a "Climate of Change", I believe that's the biggest challenge we face: To secure one future for all British Columbians.

To meet that challenge, we need to change our approach. We need to deal everyone in to BC's prosperity.

Balanced budgets and competitive taxes are fundamental. On that Gordon Campbell and I agree.

But Gordon Campbell and I have profound differences. About how to build one British Columbia, where everyone matters.

Let me start with one issue that the Premier can do something about today.

On November first it will have been six years since the minimum wage was raised. Over 30 municipal councils have passed resolutions calling for the increase. And you are joined by tens of thousands of working people who live in your communities.

The Premier took a \$54,000 raise himself this year. It's time that he gave BC's lowest paid workers the same consideration and raised their wages.

And, while he's at it, it's been six years since the small business tax was cut. I'm calling on the Premier to give relief there as well.

Here's what I believe: when the economy is doing well and we have record surpluses, BC can afford to give working families and small businesses a break.

We can't afford to waste this opportunity and widen the gap between the two British Columbias.

We must invest in people today to compete and win in tomorrow's economy. We must also invest wisely in infrastructure.

But the government is off on the wrong track there as well.

This government's current Gateway Plan spends billions of infrastructure dollars on yesterday's solution to tomorrow's problem.

If the objective is to reduce the traffic congestion that drives commuters crazy and reduce the greenhouse gases that are ruining our planet, then transit, not blacktop has to be the priority.

Half of the people in BC live in the GVRD on both sides of the Fraser River.

They spend too much of their time stuck in traffic, breathing in exhaust – time that could be spent at home with family.

They deserve better. Instead the government is delivering more of the same.

A while back I was in Surrey as a guest of the Board of Trade. They told me that they are hundreds of buses short.

They're losing routes. There aren't enough SkyTrain cars. They told me no one in government is even thinking about Rapid Transit or light rail for the Valley.

In fact the government can't even get around to building the Evergreen line on the north side of the Fraser.

Instead the government lets fares and Park and Ride charges soar, making Transit even less affordable.

Excuse me for saying so, that's just plain dumb.

A couple of days ago they released their tolling plan for the new bridge.

Under that plan it will be more expensive to take transit across the Fraser than to drive your car and pay the toll.

That's even dumber.

Today, I'm calling on the government to get smart. Look to the future, not the past.

I'm saying to the Premier, don't wait until a new bridge is finished seven or eight years from now. Invest in transit today. That's the way to reduce congestion and move goods now.

More buses. More fast buses. More bus routes. More SkyTrain cars. Lower fares. An expedited Evergreen Line.

And I'm saying to the Premier, if you really want to plan for the future, start work on a transit line to serve BC's fastest growing communities in the Valley.

Above all, I am saying to the Premier, think ahead.

If the Premier's serious about helping commuters on both sides of the Fraser, if he's serious about reducing greenhouse gases, then he'll start making investments – not sometime down the road, but in the next budget.

And if he's serious, local government will have a real voice in the decisions and plans he makes.

Running rough shod over local governments to push through plans devised in Victoria is not on. The Campbell government's plan to take away your authority over transit is wrong and New Democrats will fight it in the Legislature.

If Gordon Campbell doesn't take those steps history will judge his climate change plan as empty rhetoric and the people of BC will pay a heavy price.

So I look forward to hearing the Premier's remarks tomorrow. And if he wants to steal some of the NDP's ideas, that's just fine with me. I can assure him there's no copyright.

These steps are just one part of what is required to re-build the link between economic growth and shared prosperity. To build one British Columbia – with one future.

The Premier's own Progress Board has warned about BC's declining social condition. In their last report, they ranked BC second to last among the provinces. Ninth out of 10.

In a province as rich as ours with a \$4.1 billion surplus, that's shameful.

The Progress Board made very useful suggestions to address it.

I agree that it's time to re-invest in people and communities.

Gordon Campbell cancelled childcare spaces. I will build an affordable and accessible childcare system. So that every parent in BC can balance the needs of home and work.

Gordon Campbell put up financial barriers to post-secondary education. I will take them down. So that money never blocks a young British Columbian from making the most of their talents.

And Gordon Campbell eliminated social housing and created a homeless crisis.

Last year, he promised you action. And what did he deliver? A budget with no housing programs. That's not good enough.

Even the VANOC housing committee agrees with our caucus. Like the NDP, they are saying that over 3,200 units are needed now in the GVRD.

But homelessness isn't just a problem found in the Lower Mainland. It affects every region in this province.

And the UBCM is right to ask for a better plan. A plan that delivers the social housing we need now and in the future, and delivers it right across this province.

I will build a partnership with you to eliminate homelessness in BC with a sustained commitment to social housing well beyond 2010.

BC is a great place.

But it won't be the best place on earth until every British Columbian has a roof over their head.

It won't be the best place until communities have the resources to treat mental illness.

It won't be the best place until child poverty is eliminated and every parent has a childcare space.

And it won't be the best place until rural BC has the tools to take control of its destiny.

Permit me a personal aside about rural British Columbia.

The two years I spent living and working in Northern BC were two of the best years of my life. I saw first hand how hard-working British Columbians in rural communities provide the wealth we all depend on for our quality of life.

That's why the pine beetle epidemic should concern every British Columbian.

When the trees in Stanley Park blew over we needed traffic cops to coordinate the Ministers showing up to hand over cheques. And that's fine and good. Stanley Park is a jewel. But in rural BC we're talking about enough dead pine trees to fill 33,000 Stanley Parks.

And all we see are government Ministers running for cover.

It's an unprecedented natural, economic and social disaster – bigger than anything we've seen in our lifetimes – threatening communities and thousands of jobs.

I say return softwood lumber taxes collected at the border to resource communities. It's long past time that Gordon Campbell declared the pine beetle epidemic a natural disaster so that we can leverage more federal assistance.

The answers to this crisis are in this room.

I will continue to work with you to secure the tools and, more importantly, the resources you need.

British Columbia is at a turning point in our history.

New Democrats have always stood up for core BC values.

And that will never change.

Under my leadership, the NDP is applying those values to today's BC.

An inclusive and optimistic vision for the future that puts you, your families and your communities first.

My whole public life has been dedicated to the simple idea that everyone can make a contribution.

I stand for a BC where economic growth and balanced budgets go hand in hand with strong supports for families.

I stand for a BC where individual aspirations are supported by strong public services.

I stand for a BC where every child gets the best start in life, and where every senior citizen lives in dignity.

I stand for a BC where every community has a seat at the table and has control over the decisions that affect your lives.

I stand for a BC where every person and every community matters.

Thank you so much.