



## **Speech from the Throne**

The Honourable Iona Campagnolo  
Lieutenant-Governor

————— *at the* —————

Opening of the Fifth Session,  
Thirty-Seventh Parliament

————— *of the* —————

Province of British Columbia

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*Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, British Columbians.*

**I**t is a privilege to join you once again for a new session of the Parliament of British Columbia.

Since I last addressed you in a Speech from the Throne, we have lost many accomplished, honoured and admired fellow-citizens.

We said farewell to the remarkable Jim Spilsbury, whose love of airplanes and air travel gave birth to coastal air services to provide access to formerly isolated coastal communities.

We also sadly note the passing of Doris Shadbolt, who carved out her own place in the complex arts world as writer, educator, activist, and curator and as a beloved supporter of creativity in all its many dimensions.

Every committed citizen contributes to strengthening the communities that we all share in this fortunate province. Such a man was former Penticton Councillor Ron Biggs, who was a dedicated community volunteer, as was Vancouver's longest-serving Park Board Commissioner George Wainborn.

We remember the talents and dedication in business, culture and the arts of people like master Port Alberni carver and artist Art Thompson and others like Cecil Green who was a technological innovator and dedicated philanthropist. We pay tribute to people like the late Glen Hillson who was a ground-breaking advocate seeking dignity, care and respect for those living with HIV/AIDS.

All these exceptional individuals and many more are missed and remembered with respect.

**T**here are moments in history that crystallize the essence of a province's nature and the promise of its people.

They are the moments that bring out our best and signify our spirit to the world. They are the moments that hold within them the shape of our future.

British Columbians have been through many such moments in the last year. Together we have faced fire, flood and record drought. Together we prevailed in times of trial. And together we stood in triumph.

Throughout the last year we saw incredible acts of kindness, courage and compassion. We saw so many people risk their lives to save the lives and property of others. We saw legions of quiet heroes and selfless souls who are our neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens.

In community after community, they showed the spirit of citizenship and community that defines British Columbia.

No matter the challenge, together British Columbians can rise up to meet it. Whatever the goal, together we can reach it. That is the spirit of British Columbia.

It is the spirit of 2010 that we saw so clearly last July. In households and stadiums across the province, British Columbians waited with bated breath as that envelope was opened on a stage half a world away in Prague.

Together with the government of Canada, municipalities and First Nations, we waited – and together we captured our dream.

British Columbia will host the world for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. British Columbians will bear the Olympic torch and carry it high with pride and with purpose as it lights the way to peace, hope and progress for all humanity.

Canadians will hold it high in celebration of our common aspirations, our diverse cultures and our singular will to achieve the goals we set for ourselves, as individuals, teams and as a nation. And nowhere will that flame burn more brightly than in the eyes of young British Columbians.

Just two weeks ago, for the first time ever, British Columbia won the right to host the World Junior Hockey Championship. Vancouver, Kelowna and Kamloops will join in hosting the world in 2006. With the approval of the International Ice Hockey Federation, exhibition games will be played in Victoria, Nanaimo, Burnaby, Chilliwack, Salmon Arm and Vernon.

It is our time to shine in British Columbia – now and for many years to come. The groundwork for growth has been laid. The foundation for achievement is being built. The New Era has begun.

In every area of public policy, important reforms have been made with one goal in mind: to bring out the best in British Columbia.

## ***Bringing Out The Best In Our Economy***

For B.C.'s families to realize their dreams and reach their full potential, we need a strong economy.

The old approaches ignored the needs of our resource communities, neglected the North and failed to consider the rights and interests of First Nations.

Your government has taken many actions to bring back the best in our economy, across the province and in every region.

Major changes have been made. Policies have been modernized. Impediments to investment have been removed.

Costs have been lowered. Tax rates have been cut. Red tape has been reduced. Competitiveness is being restored. Progress has been made and results are beginning to show.

Next week your government will table a balanced budget – right on schedule.

More people are working than ever before in British Columbia. Our unemployment rate has dropped to its lowest level in years and is now below the national rate.

British Columbians' take-home pay is growing. Personal income taxes have been cut by an average of 25 per cent. Twenty-seven tax-relief measures have been implemented. Almost 90,000 regulations have been removed.

Our economy is on the rebound. The markets are up. Confidence is growing. The number of small businesses is on the rise after years of decline.

British Columbia is now leading the nation in job creation. Over the last two years, B.C.'s rate of growth in new jobs was higher than any other province's.

Our province gained nearly 40 per cent of all investor immigrants to Canada in the third quarter of 2003. For the first time in six years, more people moved to British Columbia from other provinces than moved away.

People and investment are coming back to B.C. Families and children are coming back home. Key sectors are booming once again.

Progress has been made, but more needs to be done. Your government will do more this year to help every sector of our economy.

Bills will be introduced to further eliminate the unnecessary red tape that has stifled economic growth.

Your government will act to meet its commitment to cut the regulatory burden by one third.

There will be changes to encourage employee investment and improve consumer protection. New legislation will modernize the regulatory requirements in agriculture, environmental management and the real estate and resource sectors.

More will be done to help B.C.'s ranchers recover from the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy crisis.

In addition to the \$10.5 million in extraordinary assistance already committed for the BSE Recovery Program and Cull Program, a further \$16.8 million will be contributed to help farmers under the Whole Farm Trust.

Certainty in land use will continue to be enhanced this year. The working forest land base will be established. Land use plans will be completed for the Central Coast, North Coast, Sea-to-Sky, Queen Charlotte Islands/Haida Gwaii, Morice and Lillooet areas.

Constructive new relationships in land use decisions will be strengthened.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In Partnership With First Nations***

For too long the needs of First Nations communities were ignored.

Your government has made it a clear priority to work together with First Nations to create concrete action plans to help them realize their full potential. Dialogue and negotiation are triumphing over division and confrontation.

Over 150 treaty-related measures and other agreements have been concluded that support First Nations' participation in forestry, oil and gas, and parkland management.

An additional 124 economic measures agreements have been reached.

Three Agreements-in-Principle have been reached in the past year with the Lheidli T'enneh, Maa-nulth and Sliammon First Nations, and a fourth with the Tsawwassen First Nation is nearing completion.

For the first time ever annual funding from forest revenues has been designated for First Nations revenue sharing agreements.

More wood will be made available to First Nations to open up new opportunities in forestry.

Since September 2002, the government has signed 29 agreements with First Nations to provide access to 7.26 million cubic metres in timber and to share forestry revenues of \$38.6 million.

Under the Forestry Revitalization Plan, the share of the annual allowable cut available to First Nations will be more than doubled, from about three per cent to about eight per cent.

New opportunities for energy revenue sharing arrangements with First Nations in the Treaty 8 areas will be introduced this year.

Your government is working with First Nations to develop new child protection strategies that effectively address the unique needs of First Nations children in care and foster situations.

Secondary school graduation rates for First Nations youth are starting to climb and entry to post-secondary institutions increasing.



Legislation will be introduced to create a new \$15 million BC Rail First Nations Benefits Trust that will support initiatives for the 25 First Nations along the BC Rail corridor. The Trust will be run by First Nations and used as they see fit to support economic development, educational advancement and cultural renewal.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In Transportation and Northern Development***

Our transportation infrastructure was neglected and allowed to deteriorate over the last decade.

Your government has acted to focus investments on critical transportation improvements throughout the province.

The \$1 billion BC Rail Investment Partnership with CN Rail will create an economic boom in the North and the Interior. It is a partnership that responds to the challenges and recommendations identified by northern communities – for the benefit of the North and for the province.

BC Rail's tracks, rail bed and rights-of-way remain protected in public ownership through legislation. The B.C. Railway Company, a provincial Crown corporation, will own these assets.

CN Rail will pay the province \$1 billion for the rolling stock and the right to operate the line for the term of its lease. This enables your government to pay off BC Rail's \$500 million debt and save \$30 million a year in interest costs.

CN will assume all maintenance costs, capital costs, risks and profits from running the railway to its full potential. That will mean hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment in B.C. as well as faster, cheaper, better rail service.

It will create a truly integrated, continental rail service that will better connect B.C. companies to their customers within our province and beyond.

This investment partnership will leverage tremendous improvements to our transportation infrastructure.

A new passenger-tourism service will be launched to draw visitors north from Vancouver and Whistler via Prince George to Jasper, and potentially across the North from Prince Rupert to the Rockies and the Peace. That alone will create hundreds of new jobs in the years ahead.

CN will invest \$15 million to help open up the Port of Prince Rupert. The government will invest a further \$17.2 million to expand that great northern port and to open it up to container traffic. That will create another estimated 500 direct jobs. The expanded port will open new worlds of opportunity for the North, as Asian and North American exports and imports flow through Prince Rupert.

Prince George will be the centre for CN's western rail services. It will be the primary beneficiary of 600 new centre beam cars and 1,500 upgraded boxcars. It will have a new non-stop Chicago Express rail service and a new \$1 million state-of-the-art wheel shop.

It will see \$4 million in proceeds invested in a \$10 million expansion of the Prince George Airport.

And Prince George will be the headquarters for the new \$135 million Northern Development Initiative that your government will launch this year. Legislation will be introduced this session to establish the Northern Development Initiative. It will give northern communities unprecedented control over their own destiny and \$135 million to leverage and invest in benefits for each region and the entire North.

That money will flow directly into the northern economy starting this year. The Northern Development Initiative will be managed and invested by Northerners on northern priorities to create jobs and opportunities that will unleash the true potential of that vast and varied part of British Columbia.

The BC Rail Investment Partnership will also support improvements to our transportation infrastructure in every region. \$200 million of the proceeds will be used to finance projects that are planned and outlined in the government's transportation vision.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In B.C.'s Forest Economy***

Our forest industry has always been of critical importance to British Columbia's prosperity.

But it has been challenged for many years. The softwood lumber dispute and lack of forestry investment

have made it a difficult time for forest-dependent communities.

Your government has acted to bring out the best in British Columbia's forest economy. It will continue to implement the Forestry Revitalization Plan to provide renewed hope for those in the industry.

Market-based timber pricing will be introduced on the Coast. The plan to reallocate 20 per cent of the annual allowable cut to smaller operators, local communities, First Nations and others will be implemented. Legislation will be introduced to open up more opportunities for small-scale salvagers by quadrupling the amount of timber available by direct award.

Your government will increase its efforts to open up new markets for B.C. forest products in China and elsewhere.

New amendments will ensure forest contractors' rights are maintained when licensees transfer, subdivide or consolidate a licence.

Your government will use every legitimate advantage to help B.C. forest communities and companies prevail in the softwood dispute and successfully compete for new customers around the world.

New measures will be introduced to combat the mountain pine beetle. As well, your government will act on the Filmon Fire Review recommendations.

To help B.C.'s ranching sector, the *Range Act* will also be modernized.

## ***Bringing Out The Best In Energy and Mining***

British Columbia is North America's new energy powerhouse.

British Columbia has 115 trillion cubic feet of clean, natural gas – enough to heat every gas-heated home in Canada for 230 years. There is an estimated 42 trillion cubic feet of gas and 9.8 billion barrels of oil off our northern coast and the coast of Vancouver Island.

Your government will encourage the government of Canada to complete its scientific review and join with B.C. in responding to this truly exceptional offshore oil and gas opportunity with actions that are scientifically sound, environmentally safe and socially responsible.

Families and First Nations living in our coastal communities see enormous potential. Working together, we can capture it.

The government is taking action to encourage exploration in northeast B.C. and the Nechako and Bowser basins.

There is potential in coal bed methane on Vancouver Island, in the Kootenays and in the Cariboo – 90 trillion cubic feet of gas that can be converted to clean energy.

British Columbia has huge coal reserves in the Kootenays – 23 billion tonnes province-wide. That alone is enough to meet B.C.'s energy needs for 120 years.

A new royalty regime is now encouraging summer drilling and generating record revenues for the provincial treasury.

Your government is taking concrete steps to maximize the potential of wind, thermal, solar and tidal energy so future generations will be able to rely on sustainable sources of power.

Fifty per cent of all new power produced for BC Hydro will be generated from clean, alternative energy sources.

Already, independent power producers in B.C. have proposed \$800 million of new investment in clean, renewable power projects.

Your government recognizes the enormous contribution that mining has made to our province.

It is working to bring out the best in mining and mineral exploration across B.C.

Legislation will be introduced to reduce unnecessary and redundant regulatory requirements in coal tenure administration by 29 per cent.

Other changes will introduce on-line transactions, create e-payment capabilities for miners and clarify mineral rights.

The government's new action agenda for mining will restore mining's economic potential and generate new investment, jobs and opportunities for mining families throughout B.C.

## ***Bringing Out The Best In The Spirit of 2010***

No sector of our economy will benefit more from the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games than tourism.

A new Spirit of 2010 tourism strategy will be introduced this year to ensure every region can take full advantage of the Olympic opportunity. It will build on B.C.'s spectacular all-season resorts that are already generating investment and jobs throughout the Heartlands.

The new Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre is proceeding and will give tourism throughout B.C. an enormous boost. It will be a showcase for our wood construction and will feature the best of B.C. products throughout.

There are amazing opportunities for growth in the winery and eco-tourism industries.

Later this spring, your government will co-host a Spirit of 2010 Business Summit. It will bring together businesses, investors and community leaders from across the province. Detailed Olympic development strategies will be outlined covering tourism, procurement, trade and investment and labour supply strategies.

Your government will also build on the international marketing efforts it is supporting in tourism, technology and forestry.

A new initiative will invite all British Columbians to help picture the true spirit of their province and its people for all the world to see in film, photos, music, art, poetry and literature.

Under this new “Picture BC” initiative, British Columbians’ images, words and artwork will be featured on the government web site, showcased in printed publications and profiled in countless ways from now through 2010.

Local governments, First Nations, school districts, tourism organizations and others will be invited to work in partnership with the province, to picture B.C. in films and images that suitably convey our diverse cultures, regions, amenities, enterprises, activities and natural wonders.

Picture BC will build a library of resources that will be available to participating partners for use in international marketing campaigns, tourism promotions and investment missions.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In Student Achievement***

For all British Columbians to realize their full potential, we must have an education system that is second to none and that is accessible throughout the province.

Education is the key to unlocking the promise of British Columbia for our children and the opportunities they will inherit.



Your government's goal has been to free up resources for the best education system anywhere through strong and prudent financial management and a prosperous, growing economy.

Education has been restored as an essential service. Parents have been encouraged to become actively involved in their child's education.

Today, there is expanded choice in schooling, enhanced educational accountability and a strong focus on student achievement.

Education funding has increased, despite a decline in student enrollment that will continue for years to come.

Since the year 2000, total funding is up more than \$500 per student, including an increase of over \$200 per student in the year ahead under the new Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.

The education budget will grow by \$313 million over the next three years, from \$4.86 billion in 2003-04 to almost \$5.2 billion in 2006-07.

New provincial standards for codes of conduct will be put in place to increase student safety and reduce bullying in our schools. New physical education performance standards will also be introduced.

The incredibly successful Action Schools program, which encourages our children to develop good physical fitness habits early in life, will be expanded so kids throughout B.C. can benefit.

B.C.'s new graduation requirements will begin this September. They will raise our standards and provide more flexibility and choice for students.

Several more steps will be taken down the road to improved student achievement.

New funding and investments in Early Childhood Development will help bring out the best in children from infancy to their first years in school.

The Early Learning and Child Care agreement with the federal government will inject more than \$70 million over the next three years in funding increases for programs to support B.C.'s youngsters.

The Human Early Learning Partnership, conducted through UBC, will benchmark the learning readiness of school-entry aged children across our province.

That partnership will help better target Early Childhood Development funding and ensure that all children have every opportunity to experience the excitement of learning and to be the best they can be.

Your government wants British Columbia to become recognized as the most literate location in North America by 2010.

It is estimated that 40 per cent of adult British Columbians have low literacy skills. They have difficulty in reading, writing and basic numeracy skills that place them at a severe disadvantage in their everyday lives.

Many adults cannot read at all. They cannot fill out job applications, read a map, use an ATM machine or balance a chequebook.

Low literacy is directly tied to low income and unemployment.

Your government is committed to tackling this serious social challenge, for young and old alike.

Every British Columbian should experience the benefits and the opportunities of literacy.

To that end your government will launch a major new initiative to foster literacy throughout B.C. – enhancing reading, writing, numeracy, as well as computer literacy and proficiency in English for all British Columbians.

A new Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy will be created to assess British Columbians' most urgent needs in literacy and recommend actions for improvement.

Your government will provide new funding for literacy initiatives aimed at leveraging matching contributions from private donors.

Moreover, your government will double its annual contribution to the Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program and will challenge the federal government to do likewise.

The government will act to improve literacy in our schools. It will act to ensure students have the textbooks they need to bring out their best.

## ***Bringing Out The Best In Higher Education***

As our student population ages and our provincial population grows, so too does the demand for access to advanced education.

More than 70 per cent of job openings in the next decade will require some form of post-secondary education.

Nearly 6,000 new spaces have been added to our public post-secondary institutions in the last two years. Yet there are still not enough spaces to meet current and future demands for learning and skills development.

In the days ahead, your government will outline a comprehensive new strategy to increase access to advanced education.

It will act this year to create new post-secondary options and new student spaces in the Heartlands, as well as in the Lower Mainland.

Young people deserve to know that if they work hard in school they can move on to new educational opportunities that meet their needs where they live.

Your government believes that any student with a 75 per cent average in secondary school deserves to have access to university. This year it will act to accomplish that goal by 2010. Your government will add 25,000 new student spaces to B.C.'s colleges, universities and institutes by 2010.

That will create opportunities in public post-secondary education at twice the expected rate of growth in students, age 18 to 29.

Overall funding to B.C.'s post-secondary institutions will increase in each of the next three years. As well, the advanced education budget will increase by \$105 million by 2006-07.

Measures will also be taken this year to gain better information and increase the options and choices for advanced education in British Columbia's private institutions.

More must be done to better match B.C.'s training and educational options with the skills and workforce demands of the future.

Today, there are about 70,000 job openings that need to be filled over the course of any given year. Yet there are about 37,000 job vacancies that remain open for lack of skilled workers. From now until 2010, that will mean an anticipated half-million new jobs, not counting those generated from the Olympics.

It is expected that the Games and related capital projects will generate a further 132,000 person years of employment. These are all opportunities for B.C. workers and their families.

The new industry training model will increase flexibility and choice in trades training for everyone.

A new Spirit of 2010 Human Resource Strategy will also be launched later this year to ensure our skills training

initiatives are better targeted to personal learning and training needs.

As our economy flourishes, more will be done to meet skills shortages in critical growth sectors like oil and gas, communication, transportation, technology, construction, hospitality and tourism.

When we welcome the world in 2010, British Columbia will have the best-trained “superhosts” on the planet.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In Digital Technology***

Today, too many of B.C.’s families are shut out of the opportunities and advantages in the new knowledge economy. 171 of B.C.’s 361 communities currently do not have broadband access to the Internet.

Your government will bridge that “digital divide.” It will act in partnership with others to connect every community in our province to high-speed Internet access.

This year, 154 schools will be upgraded from low-speed to high-speed Internet access, to open up broadband access points in 77 communities through the Provincial Learning Network. The remaining 94 communities will be connected to the broadband network by the end of 2006.

Once those access points have been established in each community, they will then be linked to homes and businesses.

Your government will work with local service providers, community organizations, First Nations and the federal government to put in place those “last mile” connections.

As your government extends broadband access to rural communities, it will liberate new opportunities in tele-health. Advancements in tele-imaging and digital technology will deliver better, faster patient care, closer to home.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In Patient Care***

Few challenges that confront us as a province and a nation match the task of revitalizing our health care system so it is sustainable and meets the needs of patients, regardless of where they live.

Changes have been made to improve the quality of patient care and make our health care system more sustainable. Yet the challenges remain and grow greater every year.

Simply put, funding cannot keep pace with the pressure on the system. Health care spending has been increased by \$2 billion over the past three years – or over 20 per cent. \$1.2 billion of that has gone directly to wage and compensation increases for B.C. doctors, nurses and health support workers.

Health care funding has increased at more than three times the rate of economic growth. Pharmacare costs have soared by 14 per cent annually. And still the

pressures grow, with no end in sight. As our population ages, demands increase and costs escalate.

But the biggest single cost component of health care is labour. Salaries, fees and benefits for doctors, nurses and health support workers account for 70 per cent of all health spending. B.C.'s health professionals are now among the highest paid in Canada, as health sector wage and compensation costs have increased by over 20 per cent in the past three years.

As we strive to create the sound financial footing that is critical to the next generation of British Columbians' future, everyone must share in the burden of the transformation that is taking place.

Already many public servants have accepted that responsibility, as 27 separate public sector agreements have been concluded within the government's cost neutral negotiating mandate. The workers covered by those agreements have all helped your government to live within its means and not add to our children's growing burden of debt.

The government urges all others in the broad public sector to act in that same spirit, in a united effort to secure our children's future. This requires health care professionals to also do their part for patients, for taxpayers and for the long-term sustainability of the public health care system.

Every penny of savings realized from administrative restructuring and the elimination of unnecessary costs will go back into care for patients.



Every new dollar from extra federal health funding will flow directly to improvements in patient services.

Working with communities across the province, your government will pursue new strategies to increase the supply of seniors' housing, options for independent living and expansion of home care services.

Your government will establish a new rural health travel assistance plan that will be launched this year, to help defray costs for rural families who must travel to health centres for special care.

At the same time, it is expanding the capacity of regional hospitals to deliver more care in those regions so that fewer patients have to travel to get the care they need. There is now evidence that more British Columbians are getting the care they need, when they need it, in the regions where they live.

Your government will continue to press the government of Canada to provide the programs and resources necessary to meet the health needs of First Nations in B.C.

Your government will also work with the federal government to establish a National Centre for Disease Control here in British Columbia.

B.C. is leading the world in the fight against SARS. Nothing better demonstrated the spirit of B.C. than the leadership shown by our health care professionals and our citizens as they rallied together to prevent the spread of that virus and keep each other safe.

Not one life was lost in British Columbia. Yet in one year, a lifetime of progress has been made that will potentially save many thousands of lives in the future.

Only a year ago, B.C.'s scientists at the Michael Smith Genome Science Centre were the first in the world to map the genetic code of the SARS virus.

Now Dr. Brett Finlay and his team of 40 scientists have developed a vaccine for SARS that is already in initial testing. A process that usually takes 10 or 12 years has been accelerated to 18 or 24 months, by our own world-leading B.C. scientists.

It is an amazing example of how ongoing investments in research can bring out the best in science and cooperation, to advance human health and understanding the world over.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In Sport, Music and Culture***

As British Columbians prepare to host the Olympics, your government will embrace the spirit of 2010 with new initiatives to bring out the best in sport, music, arts, culture, literacy and volunteerism.

Over \$30 million in one-time, exceptional funding will be invested to support those initiatives, largely under the auspices of Legacies Now.

Legacies Now will be given the funding and resources to assume the leadership role in British Columbia's sport development and recreation programs.

It will work with sport associations, schools, the Olympic secretariat, Olympic organizers and all levels of government to bring out the best in our athletes. It will leverage new contributions for sport and fitness from other levels of government and the private sector.

The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games are Canada's games. British Columbians want all of Canada to succeed in 2010. We want to see Canadians from every province and territory on the Olympic podiums in Vancouver and Whistler. It is the dream of the Olympics and the drive to the Olympics that will light the excitement in our children's eyes.

Legacies Now will take our kids from the playground to the podium. It will build on initiatives that are happening today – like the Spirit of 2010 Hockey Tournament – and on others that will take place tomorrow.

There has never been a more exciting or promising time to live in British Columbia for athletes, spectators and sports enthusiasts alike.

Our artists and musicians should share the excitement of our young athletes. New Music Now and Arts Now initiatives will be launched under the mandate of Legacies Now to help our young musicians and artists be the best they can be.

Legacies Now will prepare British Columbians to take advantage of the 2010 Winter Olympics, and it will continue bringing out the best in British Columbians beyond 2010.

## ***Bringing Out The Best In Social Responsibility***

Your government will continue to improve services for children, women and families.

Changes last year funded 25,000 more child care spaces, making 70,000 spaces eligible for funding and increasing choice in child care options. New capital investments have created or supported 15,000 child care spaces since 2001, largely in the Heartlands. Over the next few years, more will be done to increase child care spaces and to benefit young families throughout B.C.

Your government will continue to ensure that women and their children have the services and support they need to be safe and secure.

It will improve services for those most vulnerable in our society through regionalized service delivery in the community living and child and family development sectors.

Later in the year, the Premier will host a series of roundtables aimed at engaging B.C.'s families in a discussion about their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Building on the successful model employed to create the Citizens' Assembly, roundtable participants will be randomly selected in several communities. They will be invited to share their views on the challenges and opportunities that they see for their families and their communities.

And they will be asked to offer constructive suggestions on the steps they would like their government to pursue in a wide range of public policy areas that have a major effect on their day-to-day lives and futures.

As a sound financial foundation is established, the province will continue to work with the UBCM to create safer communities and to establish new responses to the aging of our population.

Income assistance will continue to be targeted to those who need it most – to persons with disabilities and those who have multiple barriers to employment.

More than 80,000 British Columbians have left income assistance since your government came to office. They are no longer dependent on welfare and are typically employed and earning two or three times more money. Your government will continue to help employable British Columbians get the support and skills they need to find work, to bring out their best.

New steps will also be taken this year to increase public safety and target organized crime. New legislation will be introduced to ensure that criminals do not profit from illegal activity and that victims have new recourse for compensation.

Your government will also act this year to bring out the best in our environment. In consultation with regions throughout the province, your government will act to expand our provincial park system by converting protected areas to parks.

It will reinstate funding to maintain forest recreation roads and recreation sites in the Heartlands.

And it will work in partnership with other governments to preserve Burns Bog and create a new national park in the south Okanagan.

### ***Bringing Out The Best In The Spirit of British Columbia***

As we look to the year ahead, all eyes will be on the work of the Citizens' Assembly that your government established this year.

The 161-member Citizens' Assembly is deliberating on how best to elect members to this Legislative Assembly. It is a ground-breaking initiative of which British Columbians are rightly proud. It gives British Columbians an unprecedented opportunity to bring out the best in our parliamentary system.

Like all of the other measures and reforms that your government has introduced, it reflects your government's abiding confidence in British Columbians to choose their own destiny.

The hard work of the last two years has opened new promise for our province. It is bringing our children home.

There is so much our province can accomplish and will achieve in the years ahead.

This is British Columbians' moment in the sun.

This is our time in history to bring out the best – for our children, our province and the world.

This is British Columbia's time to show its true spirit.

We can excel in every field of endeavor. We are leaders in job creation, resource management, environmental stewardship and First Nations' partnerships. We are leaders in sport and fitness, health and wellness, and student achievement. We are leaders in parliamentary reform, local government reform, health care reform and educational reform.

But we can be better still. We can lead the nation in literacy and bridge the digital divide. We can give our children the gift of music and lift ourselves higher through art, culture and volunteerism.

Our economy can race to the future with new confidence and new pride of purpose, in every region and in every field of endeavor.

The spirit of 2010 is the spirit of British Columbia. It is alive with opportunity and hope. It is the spirit of 2010 that will bring out the best in our great province.

This is more than an opportunity. It is our obligation to the seniors who built our province, to the families who strive to make it the best place it can be for their children and to the next generation who will carry new dreams for us all.

Thank you.