

GREAT CITIES AND GREAT UNIVERSITIES

an address to

The Vancouver Board of Trade

October 5, 2006, 11:45 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Fairmont Waterfront Hotel

Prof. Stephen J. Toope

President

The University of British Columbia

Thank you everyone and good afternoon. Thank you first of all for that generous introduction and thank you for the warm welcome. It's wonderful, as a newcomer – here in Vancouver and here at the Board of Trade – to be made to feel so welcome.

I also would like to thank the partners from Fasken Martineau DuMoulin for sponsoring this event. It's great when we students of the law – altogether too famous for our adversarial endeavours – can demonstrate the benefits of working together. I appreciate the support.

Now, I said already that I think it's wonderful to be here in Vancouver, but I must begin by expanding on that point. I am not merely happy to be here, I am enthused. Of course, a great part of that has to do with the University of British Columbia, about which I hope to slip in a few words in a moment, but I have to say that the city itself holds a fascination for me.

I say that as someone who was not immediately drawn to Vancouver. In fact, on the first four, or maybe five occasions that I visited the wet coast,

I have to admit that I was less than enthralled. On each of those occasions, I arrived at the beautiful Vancouver International Airport in a fog – from which I never really emerged. And the fog wasn't in here – it was out there...

The thick, grey clouds didn't just hang over the city; they nestled right down among the homes and the highrises. And when I went outside, I couldn't tell if it was raining or if the moisture was just so thick in the air that it was condensing on my body as I walked.

It was clear that Vancouverites were proud of their city. People would proclaim its splendor. They would say that, usually, you could see the most beautiful range of mountains over there – or perhaps, over there – and I would *pretend* to believe them. Returning to my then home at the foot of the small hill known as “Mont Royal” was almost a relief, providing as it did an end to the foggy suspense.

And then it happened, the blinding insight. I had just flown in from Indonesia, a country that faces huge challenges in terms of the rule of law and the protection of human rights. I had been in the capital city of Jakarta, a

fascinating but dirty and dangerous place by any standard, and I was exhausted and a little depressed – despondent about what Canada might actually do to help in Indonesia.

I woke up, in this very hotel, not knowing that the weather had broken overnight; not knowing that a cool, crisp and crystal clear February dawn had already broken over the North Shore mountains. Throwing open the curtains, I found that there is nothing that could prepare you for that view – and no words to do it justice.

But Vancouver is more than an average city in a spectacular setting. It's a great city. Even better, it's a great *Canadian* city, which almost by definition makes it the envy of most of the rest of the world. We began here with a fabulous location and an embarrassment of natural riches. We overlaid a history of democracy and a firm rule of law – that healthy Canadian tradition.

Then, on that foundation, we have built – *you* have built – great economic strength and a multi-cultural urban laboratory. As you undoubtedly know, city planners come here from all over the world to see

what you have done – to study this example of what a city can do with its built infrastructure, how it can reconcile high density with a livable streetscape, how it can tackle the always difficult issues of urban transportation. As we saw again at the recent World Urban Forum, Vancouver is a model, for Canada, for North America and for the world.

I argue that you could not have built this city or this region to its current splendor *alone* – you could *not* have done it nearly so well without The University of British Columbia. You couldn't have done it without doctors and lawyers, without architects and engineers, without teachers and social workers, without actors and musicians, without all the people who have earned an excellent education on the Point Grey peninsula.

Nor would Vancouver be a model of urban development without the input of UBC's School of Community and Regional Planning. It would not be one of the top 10 life science centres in the world without the work of UBC scholars like Julia Levy and David Dolphin.

I'm sure that you know that already. Certainly no one has been keeping it a secret that roughly 120 companies have spun off from UBC

research in the last 20 years, or that 2,000 people now enjoy some very high-end employment as a result. Many of you will already have heard, for example, about the recent deal that the UBC spin-off Neuromed Pharmaceuticals signed with Merck & Co. – a record-setting collaboration worth \$500 million.

Universities are essential to both economic *and* social innovation. They are incubators of ideas; incubators of companies; and incubators of social change. That is why universities are *fundamental* to the health of our society.

Great cities, in the modern age, need much more than a resource base or a big employer. As the American academic Richard Florida has noted, they need three things: a well-educated workforce; a creative environment; and, ideally, a multi-cultural mix – a high degree of ethnic and social diversity. Clearly, Vancouver has the third characteristic – ethnic and social diversity – in spades. And, I would argue that fortunately, UBC can be counted upon to help provide the other two – to top up the well of creativity and to provide a flow of the best-educated university graduates in the land.

But there is a degree to which Vancouverites – and I mean *greater* Vancouverites, because UBC belongs as much to the students and citizens of Fort Langley and South Surrey as it does to our more immediate neighbours in Kerrisdale or on Commercial Drive – *Greater* Vancouverites have not entirely embraced their university in the way that Bostonians embrace Harvard or Edmontonians embrace the University of Alberta. Let's change that.

I got the first sense of the challenge when I had just arrived, only three months ago, and a radio host asked me if I considered myself the CEO of UBC, or the mayor.

It was a great question, and the simple answer is that while I fulfill the function of a CEO, I really think of myself as the Chief Academic Officer – which is not to displace the Provost and Vice-President Academic, but rather to affirm that UBC's academic accomplishments are my highest priority.

But the question was also interesting for what it said about UBC as an entity on the *edge* of Vancouver, rather than being a part of the fabric of the city itself.

There are some historical contributors to this perspective. There is the status of the university as a provincial responsibility, outside the auspices of Vancouver's municipal government. There is its *de facto* existence as some kind of gentrified industrial park – in the daytime, the third-largest employer in the province; at night, a relatively barren institution, a place from which most people have been decanted. That tidal cycle in turn has created a host of unneighbourly issues, not least of all, a problem of traffic ebbing and flowing through adjacent communities.

I'm delighted to find that UBC is already making headway addressing some of these issues. The University Town residential developments now under construction or in the planning stage will knit UBC more effectively into the community. There will be much more housing available for UBC faculty, staff and students. And there will be many more services available, as well, further reducing the need for so many people to be travelling back and forth to other parts of the Lower Mainland. As these new neighbourhoods unfold, UBC will become a more complete community – a small example of the regional town centres that have become a backbone of the GVRD's Liveable Region strategy.

We also are making excellent – even surprising – progress in dealing with transportation congestion, progress that much outstrips the new housing that we have already made available on campus. Thanks in part to the wisdom of our sustainability-sensitive students to opt for TransLink’s U-Pass, automobile trips to and from the Point Grey campus have actually *dropped* by more than 10,000 a day in the last four years, despite the fact that there are more people living on campus.

We appreciate that the transition of UBC to a more balanced, sustainable and integrated community is itself causing some disruption; for example, the construction traffic is a burden on neighbouring streets. But we are moving in a good direction – one that will enhance the physical links between town and gown. Increasing the density of housing on campus for students, faculty, staff, and for other Vancouverites, is the right thing to do; on the west side, UBC wants to be in synch with what Mayor Sam Sullivan calls Eco-Density.

I am sure that there will be continuing discussions, too, on a potential change in local governance models. This is an issue of great interest to the

university, but a complex one, the details of which will take some time and sincere effort to work out. But I am committed to working them out in a responsible, consultative fashion.

There are three other points of connection between UBC and the community of which we are already very proud. First, I know that the opening of UBC Robson Square five years ago has been a success, creating an essential link and a physical presence for us, our alumni and the Lower Mainland community in the heart of the city. We want to build much more on the platform that Robson Square has given UBC. Parenthetically, lest you think that our move downtown in 2001 was our first urban foray, I would not omit the long and proud history we have with our teaching hospital campuses in the region, and the thousands of physicians who help us train young doctors there, and who conduct approximately one-third of UBC's total research.

Second, the joint development on Great Northern Way – a collaboration of UBC, SFU, the Emily Carr Institute of Art and BCIT – is also extending our reach and our economic impact into an important part of

the city to create innovations that extend from the digital media arts to the very frontier of sustainable building construction.

And third, the UBC Learning Exchange has been more than just a very successful experiment – it's something that really caught my attention when I was considering the prospect of coming here as the new president.

As you may know, the Learning Exchange began in 1999 with 30 students volunteering in 18 Downtown Eastside community organizations. I understand that the first year was a challenge – that residents of the inner city community were skeptical of what kind of *help* they might expect from pompous academics from the urban fringe.

I also understand that Director Margo Fryer navigated those waters with such sensitivity and good will, that by last year the Learning Exchange had grown to include 1,000 students, engaged in everything from building community gardens to coaching young readers in inner city schools. Many of the students are also earning academic credits in the process. It's called Community Service Learning and it benefits UBC's future global citizens as much as it does the community members and groups with whom they

engage. When I see a program that, for example, empowers Downtown Eastside residents to share their English-language skills with new immigrants, the true meaning of a learning *exchange* becomes powerfully evident.

I say the Learning Exchange caught my attention because I have long been preoccupied by the Downtown Eastside. From the moment when I first began to discover Vancouver, I have been determined to look at the city – and at *all* of the city – through an unfiltered lens. Whenever I came for a visit, I would make sure that just as I walked the seawall in Stanley Park or the beachfront in Kitsilano, I would also walk East Hastings. I wanted to be familiar with *all* of the sights and smells of this city. I took that same walk just before my interview with the UBC Presidential Selection Committee.

As an exercise, it is inspiring in its own way. It is a reminder that great cities don't stay great without attention – that if we are not all working to make our city greater, it will begin to get worse.

This question – the question whether Vancouver is still innovating or is resting on its laurels – suggests a challenge, for you and for UBC. For

example, Vancouver has accomplished remarkable things in integrating its diverse ethnic populations. This is a model city for the world and a key social, cultural and economic link between Canada and the Pacific Rim.

But there are opportunities that yet go wanting. I was surprised, for instance, that I couldn't find a Mandarin class for my children in their West Side schools. They obviously will have an opportunity to hear Mandarin spoken, but not in the classroom.

There is a serious issue there for me – for UBC and for our Education faculty. There is an obvious need for capacity building that we are responsible to fulfill. But first Vancouver has to keep asking itself what kind of city it wants to be. We need to keep innovating if the city is to continue on its path of inclusion and global economic and cultural engagement.

As an Easterner – indeed, a Quebecer – and someone intimately familiar with Ottawa and with Central Canadian myopia, I think Vancouver may be missing another opportunity – may in fact be failing to fulfill another responsibility.

In my first, and admittedly cursory, look at what's happening here – and from what I knew, or thought I knew, while still a resident of central Canada – I think that Vancouver, and B.C. could be taking a more aggressive role on the national stage.

It is not that the people here are narrow-minded. Vancouverites quickly make the leap from local to global. But there seems a certain lack of interest at the level of the nation. And I don't believe that it is merely a case of the East not listening – although *not* listening is a particular specialty among certain Eastern Canadian constituencies. No, I feel there is a degree to which Vancouverites are not so quick to engage – there is a studied detachment – and I think that's a shame, for B.C. and for the whole country.

We have seen the effect that British Columbians can have on the national stage when they pursue a passion. My friend Philip Owen changed the conversation about injection drugs from coast to coast. Vancouver is still the innovator, but everyone in Canada is following our story. And, of course, Martha Piper was extraordinarily effective in Ottawa, fighting not just for UBC but for post-secondary education across the country.

There are many more innovators, many more important thinkers, many more strategic interveners in this province – and I can tell you, the country needs you. Canada needs ideas *and* action. Vancouverites, with their *two* strong universities, are poised to take up the challenge.

Now, students of UBC – by which I mean people who pay attention rather than people who pay tuition – *those* students of UBC will have noticed that I have come to this point in my speech without doing two things.

First, I have not mentioned how incredibly well the university is doing, as evidenced by its international ranking. This is more and more of a pleasure to talk about as UBC's stature rises more and more in the world.

For example, UBC is one of only two Canadian research universities that are consistently ranked among the top 40 in the world. UBC has been a strong mid-30s performer in the prestigious *Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute of Higher Education* ranking. We recently ranked 27th in the *Newsweek* survey of the top 50 global universities.

On the question of economic impact – as a measure of how successfully we commercialize our discoveries – an even more recent survey, by a U.S. non-profit think tank called the Milken Institute, pegged UBC as eighth among all U.S. and Canadian institutions. The next closest Canadian institution was McGill at 23rd.

UBC's overall economic impact in the GVRD is worth, at last count, a staggering \$3.8 billion and more than 36,000 jobs.

It is tempting for people to dismiss those “boasting rights” as irrelevant to the student experience, but before you do, consider the case of Dr. Carl Wieman, the Nobel-prize winning physicist who is relocating to UBC from the University of Colorado. Dr. Wieman was looking for a place to teach science – looking for the best place he could to do research and to re-think the teaching of science – and he chose UBC, because he was impressed with our record and he was convinced by our commitment.

Clearly, last year's boasting rights contribute greatly to next year's success stories.

The second thing I haven't done yet is to mention UBC Okanagan, which itself is a remarkable success story. Fabulous though UBC's Vancouver campus may be, there are things that it can't easily do.

It is a challenge, for example, even with the leadership of people like Carl Wieman, for UBC Vancouver to nimbly implement creative and innovative programming at the undergraduate level. When you have 43,000 students, you make changes carefully and only when you can be sure that the new programs are tried and true.

But UBC Okanagan, a fully fledged graduate institution with the scale and feel of an intimate undergrad college, will allow us incredible scope to develop the best and most creative undergraduate programs in the country.

The vision in Kelowna – from the outset – was to build a Canadian equivalent to the best small, private U.S. graduate institutions. Looking at the quality of new faculty who we have recruited from around the world in the last year alone, I believe that vision is not just possible, but on the way to becoming a reality.

I left UBC Okanagan to this late point because, in a way, it is an Okanagan story, and one I was happy to share with the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce last week. But it is also a Vancouver story: 31 per cent of the 1,700 first-year students at UBC Okanagan this year come from right here in the Lower Mainland. We are obviously building a new institution that can respond to the needs of people across British Columbia and beyond. Already, 5% of UBC O students come from outside Canada.

I want to say again how delighted, how honoured I am to be here with you today and how lucky I feel to be at UBC. The next few years are destined to be among the most exciting in the history of the city of Vancouver. I have read and heard a great deal about the transformation that occurred here as a result of Expo '86 and I can already see the next transformation in process. UBC is proud to be an Olympic partner and a very fortunate beneficiary of the Olympic legacy with the new facility being built for the hockey tournament.

As I have suggested, two of my highest priorities are ensuring that your children get the best education available anywhere in the country –

anywhere in the world – and enhancing the connections between UBC and its neighbouring communities, in the Lower Mainland and in the Okanagan.

If you have problems, if you have complaints, if you have particularly gifted nieces or nephews – or if you come suddenly into a large amount of money that desperately needs to be spent on world-class teaching and research – please call me. UBC can only be great if it has challenges to meet. Vancouver and Vancouverites are at the heart of our inspiration. We are here to serve – and we couldn't feel more fortunate to do so. UBC and Vancouver – together we can build an extraordinary *society* that is the envy of the world. Let's make it happen.

Thank you very much.