

Paul Martin Addresses UBCM Delegates

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Source: The Victoria Times Colonist

VANCOUVER- Paul Martin vowed during his speech to hundreds of delegates at the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) convention yesterday that the next federal government will strengthen Canadian communities by ensuring municipal funding is more reliable.

"Our goal has to be to make municipal funding more predictable and reliable and yours to control," said Martin. "One part of the answer is sharing a portion of the gas tax we collect at the federal level."

The Victoria Times Colonist reports that the federal government currently collects 10 cents per litre in excise tax, and that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has requested that five cents be turned over to municipalities. While Martin noted that the details will still have to be negotiated, the Colonist reports that a share of the federal gas tax could be worth several hundred million dollars to BC communities.

According to the Times Colonist, Martin, who last weekend won the overwhelming support of fellow Liberals in his candidacy for the leadership of the national party, deliberately chose the UBCM annual convention as the venue for his first speech to demonstrate his commitment to reducing western alienation and to strengthening municipalities throughout Canada.

"This meeting brings together the two relationships that we in Ottawa must revitalize if we are to renew the solid groundwork for the century that lies ahead."

Martin also stated his belief that the future of Canada depends on healthy municipalities. "In a world without walls, where people can live and can work anywhere they want, not just in Canada, not just in North America, but in the world, our country's success depends to the degree to which our communities are places where people want to plan their roots, where they want to invest their hopes, their dreams and ambitions, And that comes down to the quality of life that you as municipal governments are able to provide for your citizens."

Saanich mayor and UBCM president-elect Frank Leonard was extremely pleased with Martin's address. "It was almost as if we wrote his speech. It was made to order," he said.

Former Vancouver Mayor and NDP premier Mike Harcourt concurred. "He gets it," Harcourt said. "I think he genuinely understands that if cities and municipalities aren't sustainable, aren't working well, the economy and Canada are going to suffer dramatically."

The Times Colonist reports that Martin's speech came on the second day of a two-day visit to the province. On Wednesday, Mr. Martin toured part of the fire-ravaged regions of the BC Interior with Premier Gordon Campbell, throughout which time he has reportedly been emphasizing his commitment to better relations with Western Canada.

"From the fisheries and the communities, involved, to softwood lumber and the communities involved, to transportation to the mountain pine beetle to safe injection sites, British Columbia's concerns must be Canada's," Martin said.