



Open Cabinet - December 5, 2001

Presentation by Solicitor General, Honourable Rich Coleman

The Honourable Rich Coleman, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General made his presentation to Cabinet on December 5th.

The following are excerpts of interest to UBCM members:

Right now my ministry is working on a detailed plan to restructure police financing. The plan should be ready by the new year and will reduce and then eliminate inequities in police services. We are also developing a five-year plan for policing to deal with the issues that policing will have to address in the future.

A key element of the plan will be to address policing in major urban areas and to implement standard technologies and communications systems. It will also be to integrate regionalized services such as forensic guidance, serious crime teams, etc., across British Columbia. We also intend to enhance first nations policing. B.C. chiefs of police, the RCMP and municipalities will all be part of this process and are part of it already today.

I realize the plan may cause some concerns for some. For example, a new funding model will mean that some communities that now receive policing at no cost will have to pay. There are approximately 80 municipalities in the province under 5,000 people, with a population of 184,000 people, and there are 540,000 people in unorganized or regional district areas of the province that pay little or no policing costs. That is over

700,000 people.

My ministry is developing a new funding formula for policing. It will be fair, it will be equitable, and it will be phased in so communities can adjust. Funds realized will be reinvested to ensure that our police are equipped and trained and informed to do their jobs in the twenty-first century. The net result will be a fairer, more accountable and more effective system of policing across the province.

The Question and Answer Period also included some discussion of Police Financing

Hon. R. Thorpe: Thank you, Rich. As you know, I represent an area of British Columbia that has a community of less than 5,000 and the largest unincorporated area of British Columbia - Westside. With respect to your approach to a new funding formula for policing, when do you expect to have something out there where communities will be able to enter into dialogue with you?

Hon. R. Coleman: Our goal is to have it ready this month, Rick. I think we're going to achieve the first draft of that. The communities will get an opportunity to look at it. It will be a phased plan, as I've said before. I

know we've had that discussion before. We don't want to just all of a sudden change the rules and have a tax burden on communities. There will be notice, and there will be a phase-in, but everybody should understand that there will be a new formula.

Hon. G. Campbell: I should just point out that at the UBCM I met with maybe 15 or 16 municipalities under 5,000 who were asking for a new formula. Policing is an issue that has been out there for some time. There's the RCMP detachments as well as the independent police boards. There has been real discrepancy and disparity in how we've funded police in the past.

Hon. R. Neufeld: The second (question) one is policing. I've also heard from a lot of the smaller communities that they want a different formula. I know that and I appreciate that. I'm just wondering how you plan to provide the services. Once you start taxing those people.... There are some, as Rick pointed out, that are already receiving those services and not paying for them - specifically, in rural B.C. I don't know where, but I know that in my constituency there are some places that are maybe 80 miles from town and never see a police car. They're fair-sized little communities - 800 peo-

ple, 500 people. When they start paying for police services, will that mean that there will actually be police service provided to them? Or is this a way to gather some money and actually be able to pay for the service that we already have?

Hon. R. Coleman: The answer to the second part of your question is no, it's not a way of getting money to pay for the services we already have. It is about balancing the model, balancing the service of policing across the province. If a community is paying for policing, then they will be allowed to have expectations that their policing will be provided.

I had a meeting for two hours with the commissioner of the RCMP last week in Toronto when I was back there, and I've been looking at regional policing models across North America. We have to take our policing and move some of our silos out of the way so the global policing takes place in the communities versus saying: "You can only work in this particular bordered area, because I'm paying for you."

We have to move beyond that so we can actually give the service of policing to all our citizens. I won't underestimate the challenge, but I also don't underestimate that the challenge is worth taking. If we don't do it, we're not serving our communities correctly in policing. I have the commitment from all the major stakeholders in this that we're going to make this work, so I think we'll get there.

Hon. G. Campbell: I don't want to

underestimate the challenge that Rich has taken on with regard to this formula. There are different formulas between the Victoria police department and an RCMP detachment here in the southern part of Vancouver Island. There's a difference between Vancouver and Burnaby, and there's a difference, probably, between Fruitvale and Trail. That's what the municipal leaders were telling us about. They were concerned about that as well.

This is a framework, but it's a framework that's built from the ground up. That's what the challenge is that we face.

Hon. R. Coleman: If I might add, I've met with the safety committee of the UBCM, and I was at the same meeting of the UBCM as the Premier. They have made it pretty clear that they want us to move on something that is fair and equitable for all their communities. I think it's important that we do that.

Hon. C. Clark: Rich, as I think someone has pointed out, some communities are less expensive to police because they're in close proximity to a larger community that would have a station and a base there. It's reasonably cheap to be able to police those communities, as opposed to a community that isn't in close proximity to a larger community and would have to have more of an infrastructure locally in order to support that.

I'm wondering if your formula will reflect the real cost of providing the police services.

Hon. R. Coleman: My formula will reflect a global five-year plan for policing in British Columbia. One of the challenges, even as you make that description in policing, is just that challenge. If a small community that had a small mounted police agency servicing it had a major crime take place or required forensic identification or DNA or whatever the case may be, those services, just like in health care, would have to be in a position where they can be brought in for that individual case. In their global dollar they're going to be paying to help support that infrastructure should they need it, because that's how you're going to integrate and regionalize and improve policing across the province.

At times it may look like some communities are cheaper than others to police, but in actual fact, policing doesn't stop at the border of Coquitlam over to Anmore or Belcarra or wherever it goes. Criminals don't know borders. They don't say: "Gee, we're in nicer place in West Vancouver or North Vancouver or Richmond, and there's not as much crime here." They will move the goods, services, crime, information and data back and forth across boundaries. That's my first objective: to remove the silo thinking in policing so that we realize this whole thing has to be integrated.

Hon. G. Campbell: The strategic shifts have been outlined. I think there's certainly movement in the direction that we wanted to go. They're approved.

UBCM Immediate Actions

UBCM President Hans Cunningham has been speaking out to media about this decision. We began asking the Solicitor General for opportunities to discuss the issue last July but have not been successful. See UBCM circular of November 30th for more background on small and rural police costs.

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