

SPEAKING NOTES

COURTS AND TECHNOLOGY

AUGUST 25, 1989

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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MEMBERS OF THE BAR,
HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY,
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS ...

IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE HERE BEFORE SOME THE
BRIGHTEST LEGAL AND TECHNICAL MINDS ON THE
CONTINENT TO ADDRESS THIS GROUND-BREAKING
CONFERENCE.

I'D LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO SAY A SPECIAL HELLO
TO THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE COME HERE FROM
OUTSIDE BC.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, I BID YOU A WARM BC
WELCOME.

WE HAVE SEEN SOME INCREDIBLE DISPLAYS OVER THE
LAST TWO DAYS.

I WAS UPSET -- AS MANY OF YOU WERE --
TO HEAR THAT THE PEOPLE WITH THE
"DRIVE-THRU COURTROOM" DISPLAY COULD NOT MAKE
IT HERE IN TIME FOR THE EVENT.

BUT SERIOUSLY, I THINK ALL OF US ARE FULLY
AWARE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT WE ARE
DISCUSSING HERE TODAY.

THE CHALLENGE IS IN USING TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE
OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM MORE ACCESSIBLE, MORE
UNDERSTANDABLE, MORE RELEVANT AND MORE
EFFICIENT.

WE START FROM THE PREMISE THAT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IS DRIVEN BY SEVERAL FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES.

OUR BELIEF AND ADHERENCE TO THESE PRINCIPLES IS ESSENTIAL TO THE DELIVERY OF JUSTICE AND TO THE FAIRNESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF ITS ADMINISTRATION.

IN EXAMINING HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN BEST SERVE THE NEEDS OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, THESE PRINCIPLES MUST NEVER BE FAR FROM OUR MINDS:

ONE, A RESPECT FOR THE RULE OF LAW, AS A CORE VALUE AND AS BASIC CREED OF SOCIETY.

TWO, UPHOLDING THE INTEGRITY OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN HOW IT TREATS THOSE WHO DEAL WITH IT.

THREE, SETTING HIGH STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE IN EVERY ASPECT OF OUR PERFORMANCE.

FOUR, A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS TO UNDERSTAND OUR ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS IN THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE.

FIVE, RECOGNITION THE SYSTEM ULTIMATELY MUST BE RESPONSIBLE IN SERVING THE PEOPLE.

SIX, TO PRESERVE PUBLIC ORDER AND PROTECT INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR PROPERTY, WITH THE MINIMUM OF INTERVENTION.

SEVEN, TO EMPHASIZE THE PREVENTION OF UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES, DISORDER AND DISPUTES.

AND FINALLY, EIGHT, TO GIVE PEOPLE A JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT IS EFFECTIVE, RELIABLE, AND EFFICIENT, AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE.

I LIST THESE PRINCIPLES TO PROVE A POINT.

WE MUST USE TECHNOLOGY WISELY, AND BE EVER WARY THAT IT IS PURELY A MEANS TO AN END, NOT AN END IN ITSELF.

AS YOU ALL ARE WELL AWARE, MY MINISTRY IS NOW IN THE PROCESS IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUSTICE REFORM COMMITTEE.

I'M PLEASED TO SEE HERE TODAY SOME OF THE MANY PEOPLE WHO GAVE THEIR TIME AND EXPERTISE IN HELPING SHAPE THIS EXTENSIVE REVIEW OF OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM.

I AM ALSO GRATEFUL TO ALL OF YOU WHO ARE HELPING US MAKE ITS RECOMMENDATIONS A REALITY THROUGH YOUR SUPPORT AND COOPERATION.

THE THEME OF THE JUSTICE REFORM COMMITTEE'S REPORT WAS REFLECTED IN ITS TITLE "ACCESS TO JUSTICE".

LIKE THIS CONFERENCE, THE JUSTICE REFORM COMMITTEE REPORT HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING THE ISSUE OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM TO THE FORE.

SOME WOULD SAY THAT THE JRC REPORT JUST SCRATCHED THE SURFACE OF THE CHALLENGES AHEAD OF US.

BUT ALL OF US CAN SAY WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT IN THE PAST TWO DAYS YOU HAVE CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION AND ATTENTION OF US ALL, AND FOR THAT YOU DESERVE OUR THANKS.

ABOVE ALL, THE JUSTICE SYSTEM BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE AND ITS PURPOSE IS TO SERVE THEM.

AS THE HUMAN RACE HURTLES THROUGH THE INFORMATION AGE, WE ARE CONSTANTLY IN SEARCH OF WAYS TO MAKE OUR WORLD MORE UNDERSTANDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE.

SOME WOULD ARGUE THAT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM HAS HAD TO BE DRAGGED KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE INFORMATION AGE.

THEY MIGHT ARGUE THAT THE KEEPERS OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM HAVE BEEN MERE "TECHNO-PEASANTS".

EVERYTHING WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD HERE PROVES THEM WRONG.

LET ME OUTLINE FOR YOU SOME OF THE CHANGES WE HAVE MADE IN RESPONSE TO THE JRC.

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, SOME OF OUR COURT ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES HAVE BEEN AUTOMATED, BUT MOST REMAIN, TO SAY THE LEAST, DICKENSIAN.

FRANKLY, OUR COURT ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL DESERVE BETTER THAN TO BE THE CUSTODIANS OF WHAT HAS BECOME, THROUGH NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN, A VERY EXPENSIVE WAREHOUSE.

THIS BUILDING STORES YEARS WORTH OF FORMS, FILES, DOCUMENTS, COURT ORDERS, TRANSCRIPTS, JUDICIAL DECISIONS, AND SO ON.

AS SOCIETY GETS MORE AND MORE COMPLEX SO TO WILL OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM IF WE DO NOT GIVE OUR PEOPLE THE PROPER TOOLS TO DO THEIR JOB.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, MADE UP OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE JUDICIARY AND ALL THE BRANCHES OF MY MINISTRY, HAS ALREADY BEGUN THE NECESSARY WORK.

THEY HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PUTTING FORWARD A CLEAR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY SO THAT ALL CAN SEE THE CHANGES WE HAVE PLANNED.

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS ARE NOW CARRYING OUT THE STUDY THAT WILL PAVE THE WAY FOR A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ARCHITECTURE TO SERVE THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

WE HAVE TO BE PRUDENT TO MAKE SURE THE TECHNOLOGY CHOICES WE MAKE CAN SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF THE WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT WHO DEAL WITH THE MINISTRY.

I HAVE ASKED THE COMMITTEE TO CIRCULATE ITS DECISIONS WIDELY SO THAT ALL PLAYERS IN THE SYSTEM WILL BE AWARE OF OUR DIRECTION.

THE GOAL OF THIS EXERCISE IS FOR YOU TO BE ABLE TO MOVE AHEAD WITH US.

AND WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, WHAT CHANGES WILL PEOPLE SEE AS NEW TECHNOLOGIES COME ON STREAM?

THEY'LL SEE IMPROVED ACCESS TO THE COURTS
THEIR REGISTRIES, AND GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION
AND REGULATIONS.

THEY'LL SEE IMPROVED SERVICES.

AS ATTORNEY-GENERAL, YOU HAVE MY CONTINUED
COMMITMENT TO DO WHAT I CAN TO ADVANCE
WORTHWHILE INITIATIVES TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE
THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM.

THE PROGRESS WE HAVE MADE TO DATE IS JUST A
START.

WE ARE LOOKING AT OTHER APPLICATIONS, MINDFUL
OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND LEGAL OBSTACLES THEY
MAY PRESENT.

I AM VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT INTRODUCING NEW APPLICATIONS, SUCH AS:

- A CROWN COUNSEL CASE TRACKING SYSTEM

- THE "ROTA" SYSTEM

- A COMPUTERIZED TRIAL SCHEDULING SYSTEM

- AN EXPERT SYSTEM TO HELP THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN USING THE SMALL CLAIMS COURT.

- AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM-WIDE JUDGEMENT BANK.

WE ARE MOVING AHEAD WITH THESE ELEMENTS IN MEASURED STEPS.

WHILE WE HAVE SEEN SOME OF THE GREAT THINGS THAT CAN BE DONE WITH TECHNOLOGY AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, WE HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT WE CAN'T SUDDENLY GO FROM THE STONE AGE TO THE SPACE AGE OVERNIGHT.

WHILE I STRONGLY SUPPORT MANY OF THESE ADVANCES, WE HAVE DO OUR HOMEWORK ON THEIR IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS SO WE DON'T END UP CREATING MORE PROBLEMS THAT WE INTEND TO SOLVE.

THIS APPROACH HAS SERVED US WELL IN THE PAST.

JUST LOOK AT THE BC ONLINE SYSTEM FOR EASY ACCESS TO LAND TITLE INFO AND SIMPLIFIED MORTGAGE AND CONVEYANCING DOCUMENTS.

THE IDEA OF COMPUTERIZED LAND TITLES WORKED THROUGH VERY CAREFULLY AND ITS TREMENDOUS SUCCESS IS A PROOF IT PAYS TO DO OUR HOMEWORK.

I AM PLEASED WITH THE POSITIVE AND QUICK RESPONSE FROM THE LEGAL PROFESSION TO BC ONLINE.

BC ONLINE IS HELPING LAWYERS PROVIDE FASTER AND BETTER SERVICE TO THEIR CLIENTS BY CUTTING OUT THE NEED TO VISIT GOVERNMENT OFFICES FOR THIS INFORMATION.

IT IS GOOD NEWS FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE -- NOT JUST LAWYERS --- BUT ALSO REALTORS, FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, ACCOUNTANTS AND OTHER BUSINESS PEOPLE.

THOUSANDS OF USERS HAVE SIGNED UP.

NOW, WITH A MODEM, COMPUTER AND TELEPHONE LINE PEOPLE CAN HAVE DIRECT ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION AND SERVICES THEY NEED.

IT'S ESPECIALLY GOOD NEWS IN A PROVINCE LIKE OURS WHERE ONE OF THE GREATEST BARRIERS TO THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IS GEOGRAPHY.

I ALSO WANT TO THANK THE BC CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION SOCIETY FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT IN HELPING USERS GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE SYSTEM.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THE PUBLIC HAS HAD ACCESS TO THIS SORT OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION OUTSIDE OF GOVERNMENT OFFICES.

I WANT TO MAKE SPECIAL MENTION OF HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE IN HAVING THE ENTHUSIASTIC COOPERATION OF THE BAR AND THE JUDICIARY IN IMPLEMENTING JUSTICE REFORM, AS WELL AS THE APPLICATION OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES WE HAVE PLANNED.

I AM EXCITED ABOUT THE LEVEL OF INTEREST, AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT OF LAWYERS AND JUDGES IN "TAKING THE PLUNGE" INTO HIGH-TECH.

I ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE WHICH I WILL BE ANNOUNCING SHORTLY.

THIS COMMITTEE WILL BRING ALL THE PLAYERS IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION TOGETHER TO SHARE INFORMATION AND IDEAS.

IT WILL BE REVIEWING THE MINISTRY'S INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PLAN FOR THE NEXT TWO TO THREE YEARS.

IT WILL LOOK AT THE LEGAL OBSTACLES RAISED AND PROPOSE SOLUTIONS TO DEAL WITH THEM.

YOU HAVE MY COMMITMENT THAT ANY LEGISLATIVE IMPEDIMENTS STANDING IN THE WAY WILL BE REMOVED.

I WANT TO UNDERLINE THAT THE SYSTEM CAN MANAGE ONLY SO MUCH CHANGE AT ONE TIME.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE MOVE IN MEASURED STEPS TO PHASE-IN NEW PROGRAMS.

THAT IS WHY WE ARE RELYING HEAVILY ON PILOT PROGRAMS AND THE EXPERT GUIDANCE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO HELP SMOOTH OUT ANY BUMPS ALONG THE WAY.

I'VE SEEN SOME OF THE GREAT THINGS THAT ARE BEING DONE, LIKE THE LIST FOUNDATION'S SENTENCING DATABASE AND THE TRADE REFERENCE DATABASE, AND THE WORK OF UBC LAW SCHOOL AND THE EXPERT SYSTEMS PROJECT.

FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE REMINDED OF LAW STUDENTS WHO WENT MISSING IN THE LAW LIBRARY NEVER TO BE SEEN AGAIN, WHO WOULDN'T LIKE TO HAVE ALL THAT INFORMATION AND THOSE BOOKS AT THEIR FINGERTIPS ON COMPUTER?

THE INTRODUCTION OF TECHNOLOGY AT OUR UNIVERSITY LAW FACULTIES IS HELPING TURN OUT A NEW BREED OF TECHNOLOGICALLY LITERATE LAWYER, AND THAT'S A GOOD SIGN FOR FIRMS WHO ARE LOOKING TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MOST OF THE SYSTEMS COMING ON STREAM NOW ARE DESIGNED WITH BOTH THE NOVICE AND EXPERT USER IN MIND.

JUST THINK, NO MORE FEAR AND LOATHING IN THE LIBRARY!

RESEARCH WHICH USED TO TAKE HOURS AND HOURS CAN NOW BE DONE IN MINUTES, RIGHT FROM YOUR DESK.

I KNOW THERE'S MORE GREAT THINGS TO COME IN THE FUTURE, AND I WANT TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO HELP YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN.

THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND OUR COURTS HAVE COME A LONG WAY OVER THE YEARS.

IN THREE SHORT YEARS, THE PERSONAL COMPUTER HAS REVOLUTIONIZED OUR CONCEPTS OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, THE COURTS, THE LAW OFFICE, OUR LEGAL AGENCIES AND LAW SCHOOLS.

I AM PROUD TO SEE BRITISH COLUMBIANS TAKING A LEADERSHIP ROLE AT THE LEADING EDGE OF JUSTICE SYSTEM TECHNOLOGY.

I WANT TO SEE BRITISH COLUMBIANS STAY AT THE FRONT OF THE PACK, TO PERFECT THESE TECHNOLOGIES AND MARKET THEM TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS, NOT JUST IN CANADA, BUT IN THE USA, AND AROUND THE WORLD.

THE EXTRAORDINARY INNOVATIONS WE HAVE SEEN ON DISPLAY ARE TESTIMONY TO THE TALENTS OF THE PEOPLE AND COMPANIES WHO HAVE SPEARHEADED THEIR DEVELOPMENT.

JUST THINK OF THE ADVANCES TECHNOLOGY HAS SPURRED IN OTHER FIELDS ... LIKE THE MEDIA, WITH INSTANT COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH SATELLITES, OR IN FINANCE, THROUGH BANK MACHINES.

IT'S A FUNNY THING THE SUCCESS WE'VE HAD IN USING COMPLEX TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE OUR LIVES SIMPLER.

THE TIME IS RIGHT TO USE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP US IN OUR DRIVE TO GIVE PEOPLE A SIMPLER JUSTICE SYSTEM.

THE PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO A JUSTICE SYSTEM THEY CAN UNDERSTAND AND USE WITH CONFIDENCE.

SURE, THERE ARE GOING TO BE A FEW GROWING PAINS.

BUT LET US NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM WE HOLD SO DEAR.

LET'S REMEMBER, THAT WHEN IT'S ALL SAID AND DONE, WE ARE HERE BECAUSE IT IS OUR STATED MISSION TO GIVE THE PEOPLE A JUSTICE SYSTEM THEY CAN USE WITH CONFIDENCE AND TRUST.

IN THAT MISSION, THE WISE USE OF TECHNOLOGY MUST BE OUR ALLY.

WE CAN USE IT TO MAKE A GOOD JUSTICE SYSTEM EVEN BETTER.

BUT IT WILL HAPPEN ONLY IF EACH OF US WHO LABOURS IN ITS SERVICE BECOMES DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS.

THEN AND ONLY THEN CAN OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM
MEET THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE
-- ALL THE PEOPLE -- IT STRIVES TO SERVE.

WHAT WE'VE SEEN AND HEARD HERE TODAY IS PROOF
POSITIVE THAT THE COMMITMENT IS THERE, AND THAT
IT IS REAL.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, YOU HAVE MY
COMMITMENT TO DO WHAT I CAN TO WORK WITH
EACH OF YOU TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

THANK YOU.