



# Mayors' Summit

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## Mayor David Miller Address to Mayors' Summit Dinner Toronto, January 22, 2004

Colleagues, friends, and distinguished guests.

I'd like to welcome you to this gathering tonight. To our friends from elsewhere, I would like to welcome you to our great city.

Je vous souhaite la bienvenue à notre ville.

I am so thrilled to be hosting this dinner this evening, with friends from all around the greater Toronto area, and the gathering of mayors tomorrow, where we will have representatives from Halifax, Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, and Vancouver.

It is surely a great omen that we are meeting this evening on the first day of the Chinese New Year. It is the year of the monkey, which is seen to be a lucky year, I am told.

I won't take long tonight – I just want to outline for you some thoughts on the role of cities in this country, and what I see as the importance of a “new deal.”

First, let me tell you the story of my arrival to this country, as an immigrant from England in 1967. When I was a boy, my mother and I emigrated to Canada, by boat. I don't know if any of you have made that precise journey, but it is a long one, and my first memory of anything Canadian was a very soothing can of Canada Dry ginger ale given to me by a steward on the ship.

We docked in Montreal in August of 1967. Imagine for a minute what Montreal in August of 1967 would have seemed like to an eight-year old boy – at the height of Expo. I was dumbstruck – amazed – by the wonder of it. I thought at the time that we had landed in the most magical place in the world. Of course, I was right.

In many ways, that immigrant landing defines how I feel about this country *in my bones*. In 1967, my mother chose this country for us. And fourteen years later, I chose this city for myself. I am now extremely proud to raise my children here, to be our mayor, and I welcome you here to Toronto.

### Why a new deal matters

A hundred or more years ago, when the planners and builders who dreamed this city were doing their work, did they ever imagine that it would look as it does today?

Did those who drafted our first laws – making cities creatures of their provinces - know how we would evolve? Did they ever imagine that we would need to move several million people

around this city every day, through a combination of public transit and cars, subway lines and roads? Did they ever imagine that Toronto would be home to such an intense, wonderful diversity of inhabitants?

Likely not. And while many of the tools they created serve us well, we have outgrown others. Just as the city does not look the same as it did when Toronto was born, neither does the country.

We are an urban nation today – a country where the bulk of the population lives in large urban centres. And we are continuously moving in that direction, not away from it.

I don't need to tell anyone in this room that cities are the wealth of our nation. You understand better than most the strategic value of cities to Canada, illustrated by looking at the distribution of GDP.

Cities finance this country. As our large urban centres go, so goes the country.

The demands on cities are more complex than ever before, and yet our toolkit of powers and our revenue sources have not evolved in a parallel way. We need the funding, the legislative tools, and the autonomy to be able to deal with the opportunities and challenges that come with that growth.

In my view, cities need the full powers of government, like any province. We need revenues from growth taxes, because these are the only taxes that can support all of the responsibilities that modern cities have.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the absence of adequate investment in our cities – in everything from public transit, to affordable housing, to childcare, to infrastructure – is reaching a crisis point.

Speaking as Toronto's mayor, I will tell you that *our city government does not currently have the capacity to avert the crisis.*

Let me use public transit to illustrate the point.

Toronto's city government is arguably the *only* level of government that can craft a transportation strategy for the city. Only we can weigh the choices, and decide what to do.

Do we build a subway to York University and beyond to the 905, making York a regional transportation hub? Do we buy more buses in order to immediately improve transit in Toronto's suburbs, currently ill-served by the subway? Do we address gridlock by building bus-only lanes, as Ottawa has done? Do we introduce a parking levy in order to discourage single-commuter car traffic? Do we work with employers to offer tax-free discounts on Metropasses?

Of all those examples, currently the City has the financial and legal power to make only *one* of those choices – enacting bus-only lanes.

And so, we find ourselves here today, at a point where the need for a new deal is something that Canadians can articulate at will, where the vocabulary of the urban agenda is familiar to many.

In Toronto, we are in the midst of conducting budget consultations with the public. We are asking the public what they value about Toronto, and what advice they would give to City Council as we prepare this year's budget with an estimated shortfall of \$344 million.

If our public budget consultations can serve as any kind of barometer – and who's kidding who – we all know that Toronto is the centre of the universe – then the political climate in our city and across the country is very clear.

People expect the federal and provincial governments to come to the table with a new deal. They recognize the challenges facing cities. They want to see a renewed investment in the city's infrastructure and services. They want to see the federal and provincial governments giving cities the funding and the legislative tools we need to support public transit, affordable housing, renewed infrastructure, etc. One-time grants simply aren't acceptable any more.

These are not radical, new ideas. These are not just ideas that a few activist mayors are advancing. Toronto's Board of Trade launched a campaign two weeks ago, which calls for increased reinvestment in Toronto by senior levels of government. The Canadian labour movement and the social services sector have been equally active.

So, tomorrow, we will meet to discuss a number of areas where we need to see improvement, and we will try to speak with one voice as we articulate our cities' needs.

In addition to what I've already mentioned - public transit and transportation, the renewal and expansion of our cities' core infrastructures, the need for affordable housing - we will also talk about other crucial issues, like funding for arts and culture.

We will talk about immigration, because major hub cities must provide adequate settlement, social and educational services to support the effective integration of immigrant populations.

We will talk about investing in economic development, in public education, in skills-training, in public health, in environmental sustainability, and in child care.

And we will talk about ways to share ideas and information, with each other, and with senior levels of government, so that we create the possibility of actual practical solutions to the challenges facing urban Canada.

## **Beyond the New Deal**

I also want to say how excited I am, as a newly-elected mayor, to be able to work with mayors from across the country, and to learn from them. I want to thank them for all the work they have done advancing city issues to date.

I want to acknowledge the work of one of the country's longest-serving mayors – Hazel McCallion, the mayor of Mississauga. Hazel is a role model for any mayor.

I look forward to working with my fellow mayors and with the federal government on a range of issues beyond the new deal. For instance, another of our features in common is the number of aboriginal people living in our cities.

Fully half of the aboriginal people in Canada live in urban areas, and this too is an upward trend. We need to take a look at the proposed federal urban aboriginal strategy, and to establish a framework that recognizes the unique place of aboriginal people within the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The City of Winnipeg has an excellent community-based structure that has funding from all levels of government, and I will be asking questions about that model.

And as Toronto's public health unit prepares a new drug strategy, I plan to study the experience of Vancouver, where a ground-breaking framework for action has been developed, based on what they call the four pillars: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement.

And I will look outside the country to learn about how we might city-build here. Recently I was in Chicago, at a conference on the Great Lakes Initiative – a fabulous example of cities working together and cities working with senior levels of government to create national policy that makes sense, economically and environmentally.

A story from that recent trip: My colleague Councillor Brian Ashton, Chair of Economic Development and Trade, was speaking with Mayor Daley and I about a series of possible partnership initiatives between Toronto and Chicago – our banks and their banks, business partnerships, etc.

Councillor Ashton asked, “Would this be something we should also speak to the Governor about?”

Mayor Daley's reply was a swift “I don't give a sh—about the Governor.”

I'm sure Minister Gerretsen and Parliamentary Secretary Godfrey know that such an exchange would *never* take place here.

## **Conclusion**

I never forget that our greatest urban thinkers – like Jane Jacobs – have taught us that city-building is also about neighbourhood-building.

And as the Italian Canadian poet Gianna Patriarca says in a poem about her own immigrant experience to Toronto:

“How strange this city -  
sometimes  
it seems so much smaller  
than all those towns  
we came from.”

I think we all know what she means by that. Our cities *can* offer the best of all experiences. They offer cosmopolitan splendour *and* the intimacy of familiar communities and distinct neighbourhoods.

We come together in cities to pool resources, to share risk, to create critical mass, to reduce costs, to learn and share experiences, to define a new sense of identity...of community. In other words, in cities we have the definitive Canadian experience.

And as we speak about the urban agenda – the cities’ agenda – over the next day, I would submit to you that this is not just about the future of Canadian cities. This is about the future of Canada.

Someone recently said “the strength of our municipalities is fundamental to our competitive position in the global economy...And they are where the face of Canada is changing most. Where the exciting and dynamic diversity of our country expresses itself...This means making good on the promise of a new deal for our municipalities – our cities and towns, big and small. And we’re going to do that.”<sup>1</sup>

The man who spoke those words was Prime Minister Paul Martin, in his victory speech at the Liberal leadership convention just a few months ago.

I think I speak for everyone in this room when I say that we don’t expect him to top that statement in the throne speech on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. We are just asking him to honour it.

Thank you. Bonne soirée.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Martin, as quoted in the Toronto Star on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003