



Vancouver Island Economic Summit

Premier Gordon Campbell November 1, 2004

Check Against Delivery

It is good to be here and to support what you are trying to do in your communities on Vancouver Island.

I want to start by thanking Bruce Anderson for the work that he's done and the great work the Vancouver Island Economic Development Association had one. So Bruce, thank you very much.

I also want to thank Mike Hunter for the work that he's done. As you know, he's the chair of the Vancouver Island caucus. I think that the caucus that we have has been concerned about Vancouver Island from the day they were elected in 2001 and some of them for much longer than that.

Graham Bruce, for example, has done an exceptional job for all of us in the province as the Minister of Skills Development and Labour. We've lost fewer days to labour disputes in the last year than in any year in the previous 25. That's because we have a labour climate now that is encouraging people to get back to work with a Labour Minister who's willing to be fair and balanced in his approach to where we're going. I think Graham has done not just an exceptional job in his task as a Minister of Skills Development and Labour.

He's also done an exceptional job for his community. He was there on October 23 when the announcement was made that the North American Indigenous Games are going to be in Cowichan, and that's going to benefit everyone.

Murray Coell is here as well. He's the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. Murray also represents a community where a call centre just announced they'll be adding 400 new jobs. That's good news for everybody.

Ida Chong is also here with us. Ida's job as the Minister of State for Women and Seniors is one of the most challenging jobs that we face as a society. The aging challenge on Vancouver Island is going to be significant. Over the next few years you're going to watch as the number of people over 65 on your Island increases by 75 percent. It is one of the fastest-growing age cohorts that we have.

That creates opportunities for all of us and it requires all of us to put on our thinking caps about how we can actually respond to those needs of our seniors as we create communities that are safe, communities that are secure and communities that are sustainable in the long term. Ida's going to take that task on.

Let me just give you an example of how the impact of an aging population is already being felt in B.C. In Creston they actually have one of the highest percentage of seniors in the country. I was going to Creston to talk to them about some of the things that they were doing with their library and how they might be able to expand their library to meet their needs. There were a lot of people who were volunteering on that. It was going to be a positive announcement so I was feeling pretty good about it.

I arrived in Creston, and there were two older women on a bench in front of the bakery where I was going to go and meet all the volunteers who worked in the library. I came up to them and said, "Hi," and they said "It's great to have you here in Creston, Mr. Premier." I said: "Thank you very much." They said: "We need more money." I said, "Well, we're actually going to make a pretty good announcement about the library today," thinking that's why they were there. They said: "No, we need more money for a new pool." This really is what really is the catch. Then they said: "Our seniors need that pool."

Twenty-five years ago I would have gone to Creston and they would have said: "We need a new pool; our kids need a new pool." That shift creates economic opportunities; it creates new obligations for each of us; it creates new responsibilities. But it does create an opportunity for us to think about the quality of life that we're going to have in the future in the communities that we all live in. It's not going to be too long before people are calling me a senior, so I want to be sure we get that right.

There are several other members of the Island Caucus here today. Jeff Bray is here from Victoria-Beacon Hill. Sheila Orr is here from Victoria-Hillside. Brian Kerr is here from Malahat-Juan de Fuca. Judith Reid is here from Nanaimo-Parksville. Harold Long is here from Powell River-Sunshine Coast. Gillian Trumper is here from Alberni-Qualicum. Rod Visser is also here from North Island.

Of course, one of our great friends and colleagues, Arnie Hamilton, is not able to join us. But I can tell you this: Arnie Hamilton is on his way back. That's something that all of our prayers have been answered with in regards to Arnie Hamilton.

I can tell you that all your MLAs do a great job and they're trying to focus on what's best for the Island. And for all of you to come and be part of this summit is really very important, because it is you who will decide what direction you want Vancouver Island to take and how you want us to move forward in this part of the province.

We've got a strong foundation we can build on, but it is your mission and it's your action and it's your understanding and your communities that are going to really allow us to capitalize on the benefits of this great part of our province.

I do think it's important for us to recognize that this is your province. A lot of times people come into government and say, you know, what we should do. There's no end of people that come and say with our brains and government's money we're going to make wonderful music. It is sometimes the case. But, you know, there is a limit to the amount of resources that are available so we have to try and find common purpose, common interests and a common vision of where we can go if we're going to maximize the benefits of all of us working together. You being here today is a very important part of that initiative.

This is a conference about unleashing your vision - not everyone saying to you this is what we want; but you saying to government this is what we expect. This is what we can do. Give us the tools, and we'll go to work on building the kind of future that we want.

It's actually kind of an interesting shift that we're going through in the province because we've gone through a period of time, almost a decade, when people weren't nearly as excited about what was taking place as they seem to be getting now.

The first time I really did a tour of Vancouver Island was in 1993. I visited Port Alberni and I visited Gold River and I visited Port McNeill for the first time and I went up to Port Hardy for the first time and stopped at Sayward and visited Nanaimo and visited Esquimalt. You know, all of those communities had plans. They all had something special that they were going to do. They all had some dream that they were going to pursue. That was in the early 1990s.

But by the end of the nineties people were starting to wonder about what their future held. Instead of saying what they wanted in the future they talked about whether or not they would still be here on the Island in the future.

We've gone through some pretty tough times, and it's sometimes difficult to shift our vision back to the future again, to shift our vision to what we really want to see happen and to take all the assets that we've been given and see how we can enhance those.

But in the last three years British Columbia has been the number one job creator in our country, and the Island is leading the way. Employment is up 9.5 percent on Vancouver Island since 2001. That's compared to the provincial average of 8.8 percent. This year alone 42 percent of the jobs created in B.C. are on Vancouver Island. That's 21,000 new jobs, and most of those jobs are outside the capital.

Just think of what's happened in Campbell River in the last two years compared to, say, three years before that. I have a very good friend who was living in Campbell River. She worked in Campbell River. She had to sell her house. It took her two years to sell her house. She had a new job; she had to move away. Her house was left in Campbell River. She couldn't sell it. Now, just imagine what that does to a mother with her family and what that does in terms of their sense of financial security in the province.

Well, now in Campbell River they're selling houses in three or four weeks. Now in Campbell River they're building new houses. Now in Campbell River there's new development that's taking place. Now in Campbell River there's new employment at the mill. Now in Campbell River there's new talk about what they can do in tourism in Campbell River, what they can in terms of mining in Campbell River. People are starting to think again of what they want to accomplish in their community and up and down the Island

We've seen a transformation take place in the forest industry. There are still some difficulties left to try and get our forest industry back to the condition that it needs to be for the long term. We see that in some of the smaller communities. But the fact is we are making very good progress right now in forestry and forestry is a critical part of B.C.'s future. Forestry is a critical part of sustaining communities all over British Columbia, and especially on Vancouver Island.

When I was touring Island communities in the spring, someone came up to me and said: "You know, Mr. Premier, the new changes that you have made in the forest industry have created a whole new set of problems for me." You can imagine how much I wanted to hear that we'd created a whole new set of problems. I said: "Well, can you explain the problems?" He said: "Yeah. I can't find enough workers anymore. I need more fallers; I need more truckers; I need more people that are willing to go to work in forestry."

It's been a long time since we've heard that on Vancouver Island. Coastal sawmill production was up 31 percent in July. For the first time in over a decade it looks like we are going to be using all of the annual allowable cut on the coast. We've allocated new community forests in Port Alberni and Ucluelet and Powell River and Sechelt, and all of those forests are there for communities to decide what direction they want to take, how they can manage that asset, what they think will be most beneficial to their community.

In mining we have 30 new jobs in the Quinsam coal project. Sixty jobs have been added to Myra Falls. There were twice as many mineral claims staked on the Island in the first half of 2004 than in the first half of 2003. That is good news. It creates a sustainable foundation that allows us to build for the future

Across the Island we're seeing new construction. From 2001 to 2003 building permits jumped 55 percent on Vancouver Island. We see the second phase of the Bear Mountain project going ahead in Langford. We see in North Cowichan a proposal for a resort and a residential development around a Greg Norman designed golf course. Mount Washington is in the midst of a \$100-million expansion preparing for 2010 and all the training that will go into 2010 and all the opportunities that will be created by 2010.

In Nanaimo we have a community that has established a vision for itself as a major player on Vancouver Island, and they're about to have a vote on a \$100-million new Nanaimo convention centre. That can be a big part of Nanaimo's future. But there's one critical component of that. People in Nanaimo have got to decide that's what they want to be. They've got to embrace the vision so that not just the city council but the community itself, businesses here and potential investors, the provincial government, the federal government know that's where we want our resources.

We have a whole slew of opportunities in terms of cruise ship development and tourism. How do we maximize those benefits not just for Nanaimo or Campbell River or other port towns on Vancouver Island? How do we make sure that all of the richness of our cultural opportunities, of our tourism opportunities are made

available to those who will visit here?

How do we make sure they know about the Umista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay? How do we make sure they know about the West Coast Trail? How do we make sure they know about Port Hardy's new proposed North Coast Trail? How do we make sure they know about the thousand caves near Quatsino Sound? How do we make sure that they understand that there's 20,000 whales that pass your shores every single year? How do we reach out to the customer and give them the product that they want so that the people who live in your communities can benefit? Those are questions that you have to ask yourselves. You have to create a plan, and as you create a plan based on your vision for Vancouver Island, I can tell you this: our Vancouver Island caucus is going to be there to work with you to try and make sure that you can achieve your goals in as short a time frame as possible. There's one thing we know for certain. The faster we act, the sooner you get the benefits that people on Vancouver Island deserve.

When you think of Vancouver Island, we have to think about the fishery. We have to think about the fishery in a comprehensive way that recognizes that First Nations communities, as well as the commercial fishery and the recreational fishery, depend on the salmon culture of the coast of the Pacific right here in British Columbia.

We have an enormous opportunity if we manage it well, if we work together. Just imagine what can happen when you as leaders in your communities come together and outline a program to make sure we enhance the wild salmon, that we have an aquaculture industry that is sustainable and environmentally sound and in no way jeopardizes any of the wild salmon runs, that we have a commercial fishery that's there, that's productive, that people can depend on. And then when we go to Ottawa and say together this is how we should run the fishery in British Columbia, I can tell you we're going to have far more say if we do that than if we speak with 100 different voices to the federal ministry and to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. I hope that we can do that, bring into focus some of the objectives that you might share as representatives of Vancouver Island.

It's really a pretty phenomenal place that you live in, and one of the things that we know and one of the things that I'm sure you recognize is that the world has discovered Vancouver Island. You weren't voted North America's best island destination for no reason. You're number one. According to Condé Nast, one of the world's most important travel publications, you are the number one North American island destination. It's not good enough just to let that sit there. Let's use that; let's promote that; let's push that; let's make sure we're enhancing that opportunity for the people that live on Vancouver Island.

Let's make sure that we're building on the technology industries that are growing here. You know, you're the second-largest technology sector in the province is right here on Vancouver Island. In fact, and this is what's really good news for Vancouver Island, you are the fastest-growing technology sector in terms of small businesses. I think we should have a strategy. We should try and make sure that small businesses in British Columbia become large businesses in British Columbia because they are successful in British Columbia. And working together I know that we can do that.

As I go around the province, I hear two different kinds of response to the world we live in. We're living in a world that's changed a lot. We're living in a world that, as those changes take place, opens up all kinds of new opportunities for us. And there are some people when we visit who ask this question: why can't it be like it was in 1965? There is nothing any government can do to make it like it was in 1965.

But then are those who say: this is what we want it to be like in 2025. This is where we're going. This is our plan. These are our goals. We need your help. Or many times they say: actually, if you just get out of the way, we'll do fine on our own, thank you very much.

So we've tried to create some balances as the government. You know, when small business said to us in British Columbia they're getting drowned in red tape, we said we were going to eliminate 33 percent of all red tape within three years. Well, we actually eliminated 37 percent, or 143,000 regulations, since we came to office.

Is there anyone in British Columbia that doesn't want to have a strong economy that supports an excellent health care system, that ensures that our children have the best possible education and that provides for opportunities up and down the Island?

It doesn't matter what your political party is, I have never heard anyone in British Columbia who was seeking political office say: "You know what? I don't care about public health care," or "I really don't mind whether the economy is working or not." We all care about that. The critical thing is to try and create an open dialogue, and the critical thing is for those who are not elected to know that when we put out the invitation that says, "Tell us what we need to do; tell us where you want to go," that's actually an honest invitation. You have to be willing to tell us where things aren't working the way you'd like and how we could fix them.

It's important for you to have a vision in your own mind of where your Island can go. And this Island is a very large place, so there are bound to be different visions in different parts of the Island. I think we have to be big enough to recognize that and overcome those differences.

What I hear from communities on the North Island might well be different from what I will hear in the Capital Regional District. What I hear from you here in Nanaimo might be different than what I hear from Port Alberni. But we have to be willing to see that there may also be areas where there's a common agenda, where there's common purpose.

I can tell you this almost for certain: if you can find the areas where you have strong, united and focused agreement, we can invest in those areas and we will run out of resources before we run out of agreement. Too often we look for areas where there's disagreement, and that's nice to know, but it's way more important for us to start building and progressing and building that foundation on the basis of areas where we have agreement. You can all do that.

At this summit, if you actually think about where you want Vancouver Island to be in ten years or 15 years, you're going to be doing a real service to the communities that you live in, and you're going to be a real assistance to us in government. We need your help on that. We need you to look at the areas where you're not happy with what's taken place and we need you to look at the areas that you think are just rife with opportunity.

I think we should all recognize this: we can't do everything. But as you envision your Vancouver Island and your future, I want you to think of how we can work together to put that picture in place. Some of it will be hard; some of it will be concrete; some of it will be new ideas.

One of the things that we've done over the last little while is we have invested heavily in education. We want education to be as close to home as we can make it. So there's expanded space in Camosun College. There's expanded space in Malaspina University College and expanded space at the University of Victoria. We've added 4,000 spaces for students on the Island.

I can tell you I was very pleased that I got to finally get over here today, and I was pleased because I want to ask for your help. I want to ask for your vision. I want to ask you for your organizers to try and take the disparate voices that we'll hear right here in Nanaimo at the Port Theatre and bring them together and bring them into focus around where you'd like to go, what you'd like to accomplish and how you think we can help. With your energy, with your commitment, with your enthusiasm, there is an incredibly bright future for Vancouver Island. And we need Vancouver Island to flourish as we build a more prosperous British Columbia with better services for all the people who work so hard throughout this province.

Thank you very much.



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