

Premier Christy Clark addresses Vancouver Island Economic Summit

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Thank you very much.

It is such a pleasure to be back in this place, where there is so much economic activity happening, with the people who are making that economic growth actually happen on the ground by dint of hard work and big dreams.

I'm so honoured to be here with you today.

Minister Jason Kenney, very nice to see you here. I'm delighted that you came as well. This is a thriving heart of the Canadian economy, and I'm glad you're getting a chance to see it in action.

Michelle Stilwell is our caucus chair. She keeps us all in line, makes sure that the meetings run on time.

Sometimes I'll say "you know, well, that was really good. I think it was about second best."

She says: "I don't accept second best. I only accept winning." As you know, she holds 17 records in her field.

Minister Don McRae is with us as well -- Don McRae, who has set an ambitious goal to make British Columbia the most accessible place in Canada as we become a society that ages and more of us need support in our mobility.

It is an ambitious and, frankly, an expensive agenda but one we're committed to doing, and it's been his vision that's got us there.

The thing, though, that you need to know about Michelle and Don most of all is that they are always fighting for the economic priorities of this part of British Columbia.

Fighting for the mid-Island, trying to make sure that your priorities are always front and centre and that we never, ever forget how important you are to our economic agenda.

That's the job they do for you every single day.

And so it is a great honour to be here in the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation. I am honoured to be here with you.

We just came from Vancouver Island University, which is doing so much good work in ensuring that First Nations are fully participating in our post-secondary education system and getting the chance to realize their potential -- but not just First Nations; all kids and learners in this part of British Columbia getting a chance to learn at a really world-class institution that Ralph Nilson is running.

Thank you, Ralph.

I want to talk to you today a little bit about what we're doing and how we see British Columbia's economy continuing to grow, because as you know, international trade is a crucial element of growing British Columbia's economy and Canada's economy.

We are a small trading jurisdiction, and the only way we create jobs and new money is if we continue to grow trade internationally.

That also means, though, that we need to improve trade across Canada. That means breaking down interprovincial trade barriers.

It is wrong that you can get wine from anywhere in Canada barrier-free here in British Columbia, but you can't open a bottle of Mission Hill or a bottle of Quail's Gate when you're in Toronto without getting that wine through all kinds of barriers.

There is more trade in wine between British Columbia and China than there is between British Columbia and Ontario, and we have to fix that.

And as I said, we aren't a big player on the world stage, so we have to take advantage of all of the assets that we have been so blessed to inherit as British Columbians.

At 4.5 million people we are not as big as Japan or China or India or any of our trading partners, but I would argue that we punch above our weight, and here in Nanaimo you punch above your weight too.

We work so hard at this, at building these international trade relationships, but we're lucky too.

We should never forget how lucky we are to have the cultural ties that we do -- cultural ties from people who have come here from all over the world to work shoulder to shoulder together, to build a great country.

Unless you are of First Nations descent, this is a country of immigrants.

This is a country that is an experiment around the world, the most successful in human history where people have come together from Ukraine, from England, from India, from Singapore, from China, from Russia, from Romania, to build something bigger and build some prosperity for their future.

That is a tremendous strength for us as we look overseas to increase our trade relationships.

We have leverage and understanding and knowledge more deeply than any other country in the world has.

We have a AAA credit rating. We have a balanced budget, which, by the way, we didn't balance just once, we balanced twice, and we have some of the best fiscal discipline you will find in any jurisdiction in North America, an 18.5% debt-to-GDP ratio, which is what helps us keep our borrowing costs so low.

We are very proud of that fact that we are doing everything we can to control government spending, to keep government small.

And always, always remember it is not government that creates jobs. It is the private sector that creates jobs, and we want to give you the chance to do that.

Of course, a big part of Nanaimo's contribution as you punch above your weight around British Columbia is what's going on in the harbour.

I'm sure that you've had a chance to talk about the study that shows that \$665 million of economic output come from that harbour every single year; 6,000 direct, indirect jobs for the people of these communities produced by that port.

And that is just part of the story as you look internationally and overseas in strengthening our trade relationships.

And the work that you're doing here is reflected in decisions that other private sector companies are making: WestJet, two daily flights to Calgary now instead of one; Helijet starting a daily flight in November daily from Nanaimo to Vancouver;

\$4 billion that is produced from all enterprises in the Nanaimo region. That is up \$900 million from the year before.

That's a thriving private sector.

That is people with dreams who take those dreams -- because we all have them -- and do the hard part: turn those dreams into reality, into hard economic output and change and growth; who take those dreams and turn them into jobs and a future and prosperity and wealth; \$4 billion from the enterprises in this region.

This region is booming, and it's going to continue to grow, and you need to, but we have to keep up with that, and the only way we'll do that is by making sure that British Columbians have the skills that they need to be able to fill those jobs.

Liquefied natural gas is just one example, could be 100,000 new jobs.

The Petronas final investment decision, when it comes, will be a \$36 billion investment in British Columbia. The total investment proposed in capital for natural gas in British Columbia is somewhere north of \$225 billion.

But we have to make it happen.

But making it happen, though, means low tax rates, an attractive climate for investment.

It means less regulation.

It means making sure those companies are doing their jobs right but government isn't getting in the way.

But the most important part of that is making sure that we have the people in British Columbia with the skills that they need to fill those jobs.

I don't look at it just from the companies' perspective, because, if you're running a business, you want to make sure there are people there to fill those jobs...but from a citizen's perspective.

Because for every young person in this province there is another dream, and that's to be able to lead a fulfilling life where they can establish their future, buy a home, buy a car, start a family, begin saving for their future.

That's what those 100,000 jobs mean to me.

It means 100,000 citizens who are able to lead fulfilled and meaningful lives, making a contribution.

Next year, for the first time, there will be fewer young people entering the workforce than there are older people leaving it.

Think about that.

Even if we train every British Columbian up to exactly the right standard for exactly the right fit in exactly the right job...there still won't be enough British Columbians.

By 2022 we are expecting over a million job openings across the province. Two-thirds of those are driven by retirements, and if we are successful -- when we are successful -- in realizing our great goal of creating a brand-new industry in British Columbia in liquefied natural gas, we are going to make that problem even worse.

But it's a better problem to have than the opposite one, and Nanaimo remembers those days, where there weren't enough jobs for all the people that wanted them.

So how do we solve that problem? How do we make sure that British Columbians are ready to take on those job openings?

We need to make sure, that we map out what we need, and we've done that, working with the private sector, trying to understand what it is that the private sector is going to need on all the big projects, job by job, year by year, month by month.

You can go to Shirley Bond's office, our Minister of Jobs, and look at the chart on her wall and find out our prediction for the number of carpenters we are going to need in British Columbia in July 2018.

We take that back, and we are re-engineering, re-profiling \$3 billion in our post-secondary education system to make sure that we are delivering on the education that people are going to need to fill those jobs...

And then working further back from that and rethinking the way we deliver secondary education in BC so that secondary schools, kids in grade 10, grade 11 and grade 12 can start working toward those jobs in areas like the trades.

For many of them it means a chance to stay in school because it's something they're interested in and be able to graduate.

In BC 20% of kids still don't graduate from high school, and we should ask ourselves why.

I think part of the reason is we don't offer the breadth of programming for kids who need it. And so for all those kids who are great at the trades, we failed.

We haven't met it in every corner of the province -- there are some schools that are doing a spectacular job -- but there are too many where it's inconsistent.

And so for those 43% of new jobs that are going to be in the trades, we need to offer more opportunities for people to find them.

Those are good, family-supporting jobs, and people won't be able to take advantage of them if we don't make sure that the training is there for them.

It's still early days.

We are about six months into what is a ten-year skills blueprint and training plan, but we have already made some progress, an investment of \$6.8 million that created 1,400 new seats in trades training.

By doing that, we have already reduced wait-times by eight months.

The BC Access grant for labour market priorities, \$16,400 at the maximum per student to study the highest-in-demand trades, which are expensive to educate.

Construction is underway on two new trades training facilities, one at Okanagan College in Kelowna, and one in Camosun College in Victoria.

We have increased the number of apprenticeship advisors that are available to help employers get connected with the people who want that real work experience.

Peter Fassbender, our Minister of Education, was down at a new school site on the south Island the other day, celebrating the beginning of this new schools with young people in hard hats who are building the school their siblings will go to, young people who are still in grade 10, 11 and 12.

They're in the ACE IT program, a program where you can get your apprenticeship hours while you're still in high school and have that add up to your final apprenticeship numbers when you graduate.

We have doubled the number of ACE IT spaces in BC.

There are 238 new training spaces at VIU so we can accommodate the need and the demand on the mid-Island, which I know is just going to continue to grow. Those are for welders, for electricians, for heavy-duty mechanics.

We're going to continue to make those kinds of investments, but we know it is also not just about the trades; we know it's also about making sure that we are continuing to do research and continuing to invest in high technology.

So today we announced \$2.6 million for research projects at Vancouver Island's three public universities. University of Victoria: more than \$2 million to fund 11 research projects. They range from genetic research to unmanned air vehicles.

Royal Roads: about \$100,000 for a computer-based simulation model that's going to help us make better-informed decisions about investing in communities.

In Nanaimo, VIU: about \$500,000 in new money to be able to do a whole range of new research here.

And then there's the tech community, which is booming on Vancouver Island.

One of the things that we learned when we lowered personal income taxes by 25% on the first day in office in 2001 is that when you lower personal income taxes, you make a huge impact on the tech industry...

Because tech is all about people, and it's all about attracting talent.

Low taxes help attract talent, and that was a big kick-starter for the tech industry.

The other thing we know about the tech industry is lifestyle matters, and I don't think it's any secret why Vancouver Island has become a destination for tech entrepreneurs all over the world.

It's because the lifestyle is great. It's unparalleled, some of the best lifestyle you'll find anywhere in North America, with low taxes, low regulation and a government that's open for business.

So in Nanaimo we have helped support the creation of SquareOne, a tech innovator that's helping to attract new tech startups to this community.

A 65,000-metre tech park is proposed for downtown Nanaimo.

Qualicum Beach has a digital animation studio that's opened.

You look at the amount of tech industry that's happening in the south Island; you're talking about \$3.5 billion in annual revenues there alone.

The tech industry is going to be a crucial element of the future for British Columbia. We now have a minister responsible solely for that area. It's not just trades, but it is trades. It's also tech in a diversified economy where we are very much going to push the boundaries for the future.

Now, speaking of the future, one of the things that we are pressed to do, required to do and, I think, obliged to do is to find a new path in British Columbia, the path down which we travel with First Nations.

We're entering a new era with aboriginal peoples across Canada but particularly here in British Columbia after the Supreme Court decision on the Tsilhqot'in case.

After that case was announced and the judgment was announced, I went to the Tsilhqot'in territory, beautiful land up around Williams Lake, and I stood on that title territory, the only title territory in Canada today, and I talked to the Tsilhqot'in about how we are going to find a way forward.

Because we need First Nations to make sure that economic development is happening, and First Nations need non-aboriginal communities to make sure that economic development is happening.

We can do this together, we have to do it together, and we should do it together to find a path for economic growth where we are sharing in those benefits so that every citizen in British Columbia, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, has an equal shot at living in a kind of community that they make for themselves, one that's healthy, wealthy and thriving.

We brought together an historic meeting of all First Nations chiefs, over 400 chiefs, in Vancouver with the entire cabinet and all of the deputy ministers.

We met for a full day to hear each other and understand each other's perspectives going forward, understanding that it all begins with dialogue.

And so today when I was at VIU with Ralph, we welcomed Chief Shawn Atleo to a new role in British Columbia.

He has been a national aboriginal leader, a leader in Canada for all of us, for about 15 years now.

He's coming home, and he is coming home in part to start a dialogue between First Nations, business leaders and government policy makers to help us find that path that will allow us to move forward together, because we all want economic growth.

We all want resource development.

We all know that in our province the bulk of the wealth still comes from the ground or off it, and so we need to find ways if we all want to live in healthy, wealthy communities to be able to do that together.

So welcome, Shawn. We are so glad to have you home.

So let me close by saying this, because British Columbia is changing, there is absolutely no question about it, and the question for us, though, is are we going to be ready to meet the challenges of all of that change.

We need to make sure that our partners across the Pacific Ocean -- and I've been on six trade missions now -- know exactly what it is that we have to offer.

Think about this statistic for a moment, if I can leave you with one statistic:

In India they have the exact opposite problem that we have. Here we are, faced with huge opportunities for economic growth, 100,000 new jobs from LNG alone, and we don't have enough...we have fewer young people entering the workforce than we do people retiring. In India they have a million people, new people, entering the workforce every month for the next 15 years -- every month a million people in the next 15 years.

Can you imagine the challenge that that poses for the people and the government of India?

We've got what they need to fix that. We've got education and we've got energy -- clean energy.

Our job is to make sure they understand how we can make this relationship work together. It's embracing an opportunity for trade like we have never done it before, and that is done in communities.

I see, for example, Zoran is here. Zoran's from Port Alberni, and Zoran heads up the port, where they are putting together a tremendous plan for growing that port and its impact on that community, a community that has wanted and been looking for new employment for a long time.

So he and his group have created a new plan for an LNG plant. He has travelled with me on trade missions and his group from Port Alberni, including First Nations representatives who are also here today to make the point that they are a place that's worth investing in.

And people are listening. People in Korea, people in Japan, people in India, people in China are all talking about the possibilities of Port Alberni.

That is a project and an idea and a change that has happened at the ground level.

It's not something that I came up with, and it's not something that Minister Kenney came up with.

It's something that local people in that community made and decided for themselves. And we are so happy to support you in doing that, because your community has waited for new economic growth for way too long, and we want it to happen.

And if they don't go to Port Alberni or they don't go to Prince Rupert and they don't go to Kitimat, they're going to get it from somewhere.

They are going to find that clean energy to power up their economies from somewhere around the world.

The other day in the Legislature somebody proposed, and a good number of members voted for it, that we just wait for another six months to do anything on natural gas.

I can tell you this: if we wait, our opportunity will be gone. We need to seize this opportunity now.

The window is short, and it's closing, and we need to find a way to make sure that we deliver our energy overseas before they decide to go somewhere else.

This is our chance, that moment in history where we have a chance, if we work together, to build something new for the province, to change the trajectory not just of BC, not just of the Island, the trajectory of the entire country, forever by creating something that this country has never seen before in a liquefied natural gas industry.

But we need to do it together.

There are those who say that when you're in power, one of the benefits of that is that everybody else is out. It's the guys who get to make the decisions and everybody else who suffers from those decisions.

I don't see power that way. I don't see government that way.

I think the paradigm for government today is how do we bring more people in.

We won the election, but that doesn't mean that there are people we want on the outside of those decisions.

It means that we want First Nations to be inside and part of those decisions.

We want unions to be inside and part of those decisions. We want communities to be inside and part of those decisions.

We want to build a bigger inside so that there are fewer people who feel like they are on the margins and don't have a chance to take part.

To me that is the way we will build a future for British Columbia that works.

It's one where we do it together and where we all recognize that we all have a stake in prosperity, in building a future for our kids.

Thank you.