

# Vancouver Island Summit speech

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I want to say thank you very much, Michelle. Michelle is such an incredible champion for the Island. We call her the iron hand in the velvet glove, because she has a way of getting what she wants every time. Tenacious, fighting for it, making it happen, and when she makes it happen, you feel really great about having helped her. That's the mark of a real leader. Not everybody has the capacity to be able to do that, to get things done when they're really hard to do, and nobody necessarily sees the wisdom right away in doing them. Then when it happens, that people feel really good about the outcome and feel like they've been a part of the team. She's very special, you are very lucky to have her. I want to say a very big thank you to Michelle Stilwell today.

But of course the problem with Michelle is, she's also little miss perfect. All the women in this room probably all want to grow up to be Michelle Stilwell when we finally grow up. And it reminds me, I was with my son when the duke and duchess were in Victoria, and we were watching the duchess review the troops and do all the work that she was doing. I turned to my son Hamish and I said, you know, I just cannot imagine being that perfect, and my son turns to me and he goes, yeah I bet you can't.

He said to me this morning, actually, do you ever regret having kids? I didn't answer that.

Thank you all for being here. Thank you to the Snuneymuxw First Nation for hosting us on your traditional territory. Thanks to Michelle and Don McRae, our small but mighty Vancouver Island government caucus. They are small but mighty. They are definitely small. But they pack a punch, and they're also completely

gender-equal caucus. Between them, they have six Paralympic gold medals. Don McRae always reminds us that that means it's an equivalent of three Paralympic gold medals for each of them.

George Hanson, thank you for the work that you do. Ten years of your passionate, devoted work on Vancouver Island. The economic reports that you're producing now are really, they're a touchstone for investors, for government, for community to start charting the way forward. I know it's just a ton of work for you, but you are an example of how one person can make a tremendous difference in a community. So thank you, George.

I've told some of you this before, the story of how my grandfather who was born in a little shack, as far as we could tell, on the beach in Tofino in 1899. And he was the third non-aboriginal child to have his birth registered in the community. It was mostly a First Nations community at the time, very different from what we see today. I think back, I try and imagine that moment when my great grandmother, in 1899 in a shack in Tofino, with probably an Ahousaht midwife there to help deliver her baby, looked at my grandfather for the first time. She thought what we all think when we look at our children for the very first time. That we want to build a better future for our kids than we had. In her case, her current circumstances probably weren't that great, and ours are a lot better. But those dreams haven't changed. Those are the dreams of I'm sure every single one of you and your forebearers, if they were the first ones to come to the coast here in BC. The story, my story, of my family's coming here to Vancouver Island all those years ago, is not different in its essentials from the stories that so many of you, almost all of you, would tell.

The only ones in this room who would have a different story about the past would be First Nations. Having been

here for millennia, they didn't come here from anywhere. First Nations stories about the past might be different. But just like all of us in this room, their hopes for the future are exactly the same. To grasp a piece of the future for their children so that they have a better shake at life than the one that we had. That is our collective purpose. To build a future for our kids and our grandkids that is better than the one that we have today.

We have begun that work together. Victoria, the lowest unemployment rate of any city in Canada today. Vancouver Island. An unemployment rate of 5.4%, again amongst the lowest in the country. Twelve thousand jobs created on Vancouver Island, 5,300 of them created right here in Nanaimo. Your unemployment rate on the Island is fully 1.5% lower than the national average. And compare that to where you have been when the unemployment rate 15 years ago wasn't 5.4%, it was 12%. In Nanaimo, it wasn't 5.4%. It was 17%. Two and a half times what it is today.

I remember driving down all the main roads in Nanaimo and seeing empty stores, for lease signs, that would be up and wouldn't come down, because there wasn't a demand from business in this community. Boy have things changed. Look at this room. Look at this room that George has filled up, with all of these businesspeople and community members who are intent on building something even better.

One of the reasons that this community, and that Vancouver Island has seen the success that it has and the change that you have, is partly because of government, mostly because of you. But what can government do? What have we been doing? Making smart investments in infrastructure, ones that we can see the biggest bang from the buck. Opening up trade for new investment, new customers from overseas. Cutting red tape and

keeping taxes low, so the business environment remains attractive. Most of all, investing in people. Making sure that we create a different economy by investing in our most important resource, the people of BC. It is investing in people that makes it possible for us to reach our goal of making sure that we are able to put British Columbians first.

That started with building a strong economy. It started with making sure that we become first in Canada in economic growth, and we've done it. Making sure we have the lowest unemployment rate in Canada, and we've done it. First in creating jobs, having the lowest taxes for middle-class families, and making sure that we are looking after the future for our kids. Controlling government spending. Four straight balanced budgets and a fifth one about to be delivered in the spring.

It's been hard to do that, but we've gotten there. It's been really important. It's been important that we balance our budgets because that's also meant that we are now on track to eliminating our operating debt for the first time in British Columbia since 1974. We are running the biggest surplus in any province in Canada. We aren't running the surplus because people are paying more taxes. We are running a surplus because more people are working and paying taxes. Those points aren't ones I make because I want to tell you that we're in an enviable position, which we are. They're points that I make because I want you to know that now is the time where we have this unique opportunity in the country, which no one else has, to be able to make significant, smart, investments in our citizens.

Take health, for example. Over the next three years, we are investing more than we ever have in keeping people healthy. And that includes Vancouver Island. Within this

next year, we will have two new hospitals open their doors. The 153-bed Comox Valley Hospital and the 95-bed Campbell River Hospital. Altogether, that is an investment of \$606m for people on the Island, and that patient care will join the new patient care tower at Royal Jubilee, the expansion of the OR at Nanaimo, the expansion of the emergency ward at Vic Gen, and a range of other investments that we've made in the health of the people who live here.

This is one of the best places to live anywhere on the globe. Let's make sure that people have as much time to live that life, with as much health and opportunity as they can.

Look at Ron Cantelon. I met Ron Cantelon when he was starting to raise money for the theatre here in Nanaimo. Ron was already older than me then. Then he went on with the Port Authority, he's worked as an MLA, he's worked as a businessman, he's worked as an advocate in this community. He's been chair of this organization. You look at Ron today, how active and interested and engaged he is. He is an example of the wealth of people on the mid-Island, on Vancouver Island, whose life doesn't stop when you end your first job. Your working life goes on.

I remember, the one and only time that I ever met Ronald Reagan. He said to me that when he went to kindergarten with Ron, he remembered that he was the hardest-working guy in the school back in those days. And he's still going. That's something that we need to invest in. We need to invest in health and long life, recognizing that everybody, if you have the opportunity, is going to continue to contribute.

We don't want life just to be healthy. We want life to be affordable. One of the downsides of a fast-growing

economy is that life does get more expensive. The biggest area where we've seen that growth has been in housing. We're pushing back in the housing market in Vancouver with a 15% tax on foreign buyers, because we want to keep the dream of home ownership alive for people who live in the middle class in our province. We also have to help people who are struggling to get into the middle class or to stay in the middle class. Low and moderate-income families, students, seniors. People looking for a place to call home, but can't afford it. In less than one year, we've committed \$855m to deliver 6,000 new affordable rental housing units all across the province, including here on Vancouver Island. And that is in addition to the six affordable housing projects that are already underway, which is about 320 units. I'm pleased to announced today that there are going to be eight new housing projects on the Island, in Sooke, in Colwood, in Langford, Saanich, Victoria, and altogether that means another 510 units of affordable rental housing for this Island in a very hot market.

And we are not done. There is much more to do on housing, and I hope I get the chance to come back next year to talk to you about that. You'll have to decide whether I'm coming back, though.

I remember the one I came to, I was here at the end of 2012, and nobody thought I was coming back. Do you remember that? Ron did.

Housing is one way that we make sure that British Columbians are benefitting from this strong, diverse economy. So is skills training, and that's been a big issue for employers, on the Island and lots of places across British Columbia. Because building housing helps the people who need affordable housing. It also helps create jobs across the province. But who's going to build those houses? I think it should be British Columbians who get

first crack at those jobs. The only way to make sure that that happens is if we provide people here with the training that they need to be able to fill those jobs. Again, that is the difference that government can make. We can support job creation with projects like housing, with projects like the John Hart dam in Campbell River, with hospital investments in Comox and the Capital Region. So that Islanders don't have to leave to find work.

Then we have to also make sure that the people who live here have the skills that they need to take those jobs again, so that they don't have to leave to get an education, so that they can find work somewhere else. The Trades Training Centre at Camosun has been a huge success. The trades training at VIU, again, and at North Island College, phenomenally successful. Today I'm pleased to announce an additional 744 seats for North Island College for skills training and high-priority trade seats.

That is 744 seats for electricians, welders, carpenters, plumbers, cooks, and heavy mechanical group trades. We have worked hard to build those fundamentals, to make sure that our economy is strong and well-supported. Now we have the unique opportunity in Canada, as I said, to spend money investing in people.

Which leads me to talking about this last investment, which I think is the one I am most proud of. It isn't our biggest investment by any stretch, but it's the one that has meant the most to me and I think to Michelle, and many members, particularly the women in our cabinet.

Used to be that if a single parent was looking for work, that they would have to go get training in order to find that work - a single parent on social assistance. Because you're on social assistance, you probably don't have the skills that you need to get a job. So single parents on

welfare would go to the ministry and they would say, we want to find work. Well, they would say, okay, go get training. But you're going to have to pay for your training. And once you figure out how to pay for your training.

Single parents would have to go, if they wanted to get off social assistance, they would have to pay for their own training. They would have to pay for their transportation to get to school. They would have to pay for their own childcare because they're single parents. For somebody to look after their kid while they're at school. And guess what, the day they started their education to get a job, the government would stop their welfare cheque coming. Period.

So guess what? Not that many single parents found their way off welfare in BC. Despite the fact that we always say, for years and years, why don't you get off welfare and find a job? We were trapping them. Government was trapping those parents on the welfare treadmill and not giving them a way off. So we changed it. And now if you are a parent, a single parent on social assistance, we pay your tuition. We pay for your transportation to get there. We pay for your books. We pay for your childcare and we keep your welfare cheque coming.

And guess what? Three thousand, three hundred single parents in BC in the last year have found their way through that program; 91% of them women.

Seven hundred and twenty eight of those people are from the Island. Those are 728 people, 91% of them women, who are now setting a very different example for their kids.

The thing that they say that is most moving for people like Michelle and me when we get to meet them is they say the biggest difference in their lives is not the job. It's not even going to work every day. It's coming home from



work every day. And the look that they see in their children's eyes is totally different. Because what they see is pride.

Together we have built a strong future, I think, for people on VI. This is one of the most diverse economies in BC, certainly in Canada. Some of the lowest unemployment you'll find anywhere in Canada. Incredible universities and colleges. I always say every great city has a great university, and this city has a great university in VIU. Victoria has a great university in UVic, and Royal Roads. Think about the institution North Island College. Another great institution. Camosun College. The breadth of the work that is happening that is making it possible for people to get the skills that they need on this island. It is what is going to propel us into the future.

Being in government is sometimes kind of tough. It's not as tough as parenting a 15-year-old or standing next to Michelle Stilwell. But it is tough. Lots of that is because, as you know when you're running your business, every day you go to work and you think I've just got to move the ball a little bit forward to meet my goals. We have begun to meet a lot of the goals that we set out for British Columbians four years ago.

Now we get to do the part of this that is the most fun. Which is thinking about what's next. What will we do for the next four years? And the years after that? What do we need to invest in to make VI strong? And this is a vital part of BC's economy. You should never forget that. This community is a vital part of our province's social fabric. In the next six months, we are going to be preparing and publishing an economic investment plan that is going to be focused specifically on how we grow jobs and investments in people on VI.

Don McRae is going to chair that for us. His last hurrah as

your MLA. And I need you to be a part of helping us think about the future. What about post-secondary education? What about film and culture? What about technology? Technology companies are flocking to this island. In BC, we just created a \$100m venture capital fund to make capital more available for small, fledgling companies. How can we do more to grow support for the tech community?

I'm very hopeful that one day I'll have Paris Gaudet sitting beside me, helping me understand how we can do this. How we can make BC's and VI's tech community even stronger, given her incredible record in building tech on this island already.

The tourism business is up by 18%. What can we do to grow the number of attractions for people to come see so they stay longer on the Island? How do we improve the experience on BC Ferries? How do we improve the experience for campers on VI? We need your help in formulating these ideas for the future. Thanks to leaders like Dallas Smith in helping us conclude a 10-year negotiation to set aside 7% of BC's landmass in perpetuity, and we call it the Great Bear Rainforest. Thanks to Dallas, we have this incredible tourist attraction in our province. How do we connect visitors to the forest with all the tourist amenities and opportunities that are here on VI?

In Kelowna, we've established an incredible agro-tourism industry. How do we make sure that VI is Kelowna's equal when it comes to agro-tourism, whether it's in wineries, distilleries, craft brewery or organic food. You name it. Shouldn't there be as many tourists coming here on an ale trail on VI as they do to the Okanagan?

What are the barriers in the way of First Nations making sure that they have a fair shake at economic growth for

their kids? How do we knock those remaining barriers down?

What are the skills that our children will need to build a future of their own and shape their own future in BC? We have built, renovated, renewed, replaced 87 schools on VI. What will we do, where will we focus for the next ones that we build? What do we want those teachers to be thinking about and those children to be learning?

Our forest industry here is succeeding. It's doing well. But it needs to adapt. It needs to innovate. We need to value add without hurting jobs, particularly out in the bush on this part of the Island. How do we help them find the best ways to adapt and innovate?

And let's not forget about manufacturing. Like our VI caucus, the manufacturing sector here on VI is small but mighty. And like our VI caucus, I hope it has a huge opportunity to grow in the next few years. We need to focus on how we're going to make sure that the manufacturing industry gets more than a foothold on VI by opening markets, by offering incentives and by making sure that what comes from BC can be made in BC.

But last, I'll add this. Because not all the questions that we will talk to you about that Don will talk to you about as we formulate our plan for the next decade for VI will be about all the change that we want. Some of it will be about the change that we don't want. Like climate change, as one example. We are leaders in the world on climate change. We will be accepting an award from the United Nations in the next few weeks honouring BC among a handful of jurisdictions that have led the fight and set the example around the world.

We are adding to that record by electrifying our gas patch. By working to encourage net-zero emissions buildings. By investing in transit. But there is so much

more that we need to do in order to stay in front of the fight against climate change. And we're going to need your help with that.

And the second one is this. This is something more, though, for another level of government. Because it's not just about pollution in the air. There's also pollution of our beautiful, pristine coast. As we've learned this month in Bella Bella, we still do not have adequate spill response here in BC. Successive federal governments over decades have failed BC. They have left us under-protected and exposed to incredible risk. Something that would have been unthinkable if we were living on the East Coast of this country.

I have told Prime Minister Trudeau that he has a unique opportunity to be the person that fixes this historic inequity. He has the opportunity to fix it, and in fixing it, he has the chance to also ensure that First Nations are uniquely and newly engaged in making sure we are looking after our coast. After all, as my grandfather and great-grandfather learned, fishing the oceans in the West Coast of this Island for decades with First Nations fishermen beside them, there is no one in BC who knows and understands our coast than the First Nations who have been here for millennia.

So thank you for coming. Thank you for taking the time to listen to what I had to say today. I just want to finish by saying this: we really do have a unique opportunity in Canada. There is no other province that has the ability to invest in people like we do today. It was tough getting here. We balanced our budget. We paid down our debt. We are paying down our debt. We have the money that we need to invest now in putting British Columbians first.

And you know what? The best thing about it is everybody said that we couldn't possibly do it. Actually, everybody

said that I couldn't possibly do it. There is a lot of bad news out there. I think, especially if you've come recently from another part of the country like Alberta or Ontario, you've seen your fair share of that. We here are bucking the trend. This innovative, entrepreneurial, forward-looking population in our province is making this a unique example in North America. So let's keep dreaming big. We got where we are today because so many of you with so many good ideas were determined to make them happen. We can make them happen and we can do it for another generation that comes after us. That is what I call putting British Columbians first. Thank You.