

Mike Farnworth Official Campaign Launch Speech
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Thank you all so much for joining me here today. Thanks to all my family and friends and my partner Doug for your support.

Let me end the suspense and get this out of the way. Today I am announcing that I am seeking the leadership of the BC New Democratic Party.

The next leader of the NDP will be chosen by thousands of people just like you so today is really my first interview for the job. And friends, this is one of the most important decisions you will ever have to make. We have a dynamic and talented field of candidates and I am proud and honoured to be part of this race.

And you're not just choosing the next leader of the Official Opposition. Let's be clear: You are choosing the next Premier of the province after we defeat the Liberal government.

Let me thank my friend and colleague Rob Fleming for being here from Victoria. I want to thank him and Norm Macdonald who's in Revelstoke for their kind words. Having both of you support me and this campaign shows we that can and will unite the NDP.

That is one of the key reasons I'm running; to bring an end to the divisions in our party and caucus. It's no secret that in the last few months we have been more focused on internal party matters than on the issues that are important to you and your family. We all share responsibility and I want to make it clear that you all deserved better.

Friends, it is time to heal the wounds and focus again on what is important to you. I give you my commitment that my campaign will be forward looking and engage each person with respect.

The days of infighting are over. And, the days of healing and unity begin now.

I am also running because I love our province deeply and feel a profound duty to you, the hard working British Columbians who want a real choice in the next election.

The people of British Columbians deserve a focused, viable government in waiting. And together, we will give it to them.

Too often government and politicians think they have all the answers. Well, we don't. Child poverty, rural development, gang violence, problems with the health

care system. The answers to these problems lie with the people in communities around this province. The answers are there if politicians will listen. That's the approach I've always taken, and it's the approach I'll take as leader.

That means building an alternative that is just as comfortable talking about the economy and public safety as it is talking about social justice and health care and education. That means building a party based on the input of each and every one of you.

I have said many times in the past that the NDP's challenge isn't to move to the left or the middle- it's to be relevant to people. To be firmly grounded in the reality of their lives. In the reality of our communities. In the reality of our province.

Let the BC Liberals play the old class warfare politics of fear and division.

I am going to listen to British Columbians and build a policy foundation based on your view of what is important. I want to talk to British Columbians about how we get the economy working for people. Especially when times are tough.

There are some that may be doing well, but there are thousands of others in Vancouver, in Port Coquitlam and Burnaby and Surrey, and in Prince George and Campbell River and Cranbrook who are worried about making ends meet.

There are too many people in this province who feel invisible to politicians and the governments who are supposed to serve them. Well, you're not invisible to me. You never have been. And, you never will be.

I will work with you and on your behalf for long term solutions to ensure that each and every citizen, regardless of where they live, can look forward to a prosperous, safe and sustainable future for not only them, but their children and grandchildren.

I want to hear your views on how to deal with the disgraceful BC Liberal legacy of our great province leading the country in child poverty rates.

Of course, we need to raise the minimum wage. And we will. But we also need to make sure there is real support for people who are working and still can't afford to buy their child a winter coat. It's not only important economically, but I believe that we have a shared moral responsibility to ensure that people who are willing to work hard don't have to raise their children in poverty.

We need a government that listens to people and families on the things that matter.

I believe there is no reason to concede any issue to the BC Liberals; especially not the economy, not on jobs, not on the environment, and certainly not on public safety.

Because you can't and we shouldn't try to separate economic success from social success.

We know that education will be the key to unlocking that success, and yet the BC Liberals have spent their time in office focused on cutbacks, not strategy.

We need a comprehensive approach to education, from kindergarten to high school, and including both, university, apprenticeships and training programs. And I will argue in this campaign for a provincial commission on education for the 21st century.

I also recognize that we are living in different times. Climate change and its impacts on every part of our life are a reality. Doing things differently is no longer a choice; it's a necessity. Under my leadership, we will pay more than lip service to the notion of sustainability. We will make sustainability a key lens for every public policy decision we make.

For me, this is a life-long commitment. Some of you in this room cast your first ballot for me when I ran for City Council as a 24 year old. I ran for office then out of a deep concern for the future of the Coquitlam River and Colony Farm lands. Together, we have protected those gems of our community and we'll do even more together in the future.

I believe we need to provide practical solutions that both tackle climate change and make a real difference in people's lives. That's why I support using the existing carbon tax to fund public transit. If there's going to be a carbon tax, let it be used to deliver important transit projects like the Evergreen Line right here in the Tri-Cities.

A new approach also means that we can't just give up on the resource industries like forestry that have been the back bone of our province.

We should never lose sight of the fact that much of the wealth in BC is created outside of the Lower Mainland. And it's that wealth that funds the public services we all rely on. Places that the BC Liberals once called the heartlands have been abandoned by this government.

They may think Rural BC is part of the past, but I see it as key to our future. I support an ambitious Rural Economic Development program that relies on the expertise and know-how of the people who actually live there.

It's an approach that also says we must do better on health care. It's not good enough to say to people waiting for knee replacement surgery or waiting in ER rooms that we're working on it.

Especially when they hear that their tax dollars are being spent on hiring people in the health system to tell them what a great job their doing, and not on health care itself. My commitment is that health care dollars be spent on delivering health care.

I am running because I want to practice a different approach to government.

Let me end by comparing this approach to the approach of the BC Liberals.

Kevin Falcon, George Abbott and Christy Clark believe that they know what is best for you. They believe that government in Victoria knows what will work in your community better than the people who actually live there.

Gordon Campbell thought that way too. And yet after ten years of Liberal government we know their legacy well.

Rising unemployment...gang violence...declining health care and education...record debt and deficits...the only thing BC leads the country in...is child poverty.

Friends, if you ran your household finances like they have run the province the banks would take your credit cards away.

That brings us to the Liberal leadership race, which is quite the spectacle.

You have four candidates who have been joined at Gordon Campbell's hip for over a decade who are now trying to convince British Columbians that they have never met the guy.

How about their "outsider" candidate who was Deputy Premier and the second most powerful person in the Gordon Campbell government?

Talk about a case of meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

That's not change. That's déjà-vu.

The two clearest examples of where the Liberals haven't been listening are the BC Rail trial and the HST.

Now you no doubt have heard some of the BC Liberal candidates say we can't afford a public inquiry.

Did you ever notice how the BC Liberals are suddenly concerned about costs when it's their future at stake? Finding out the truth about the rotten sell-off of a public asset? That might be pricey they say.

Well, after we win this race and the next election, there will be a full, public inquiry into the sale of BC Rail.

And then there's the HST.

Apparently, bringing in the HST and raising the costs of almost everything for you and your family...well that's an expense the BC Liberals think we can afford.

The Liberals promised in the election that they wouldn't introduce it. Then they did, without consultation. Despite the public being against it, they passed it. And now their leadership candidates are tripping over themselves trying to figure out how to deal with it.

Well, we know where the public stands. And it was the BC Liberals who created this HST mess to begin with.

But just like you have to pick up after your dog, we will find a way to clean it up.

Let me be absolutely clear: I will take my direction from the people of this province. And if they vote to do so, we will end the HST.

To those Liberal candidates who now say...just trust us...let's have a free vote in the Legislature, I say:

Your side had three chances to turn down the HST and you didn't. The fourth time is not the charm.

Friends, my campaign is your campaign because it is you, party members, who are going to be doing the hiring at the end of the day.

I, and every other candidate in this race, can't win without the support of people like each of you here today.

Now it is time to get to work

If you're ready for change, I am ready to lead.

Thank you!