

# Editorial: Don't overlook Island's issues

It's no surprise Vancouver Islanders feel slighted by the provincial government. The B.C. Liberals said we paid a price for having just two MLAs on the government side. The NDP promised to do better.

Now, as we take the first steps into a precarious period in B.C. politics, it's time for the parties to make specific commitments to address key issues in the capital region and on the Island.

We've addressed two such issues in previous editorials — the need for a coherent transportation strategy and provincial leadership in looking for better ways of governing the capital region and its 13 municipalities.

Islanders should also be looking for an economic development policy that reflects their needs.

Start with tourism. The editorial on transportation noted that B.C. Ferries fares have increased three times faster than inflation since 2008. That's made the Island less attractive as a tourist destination, and hampered industry growth.

The Belleville Terminal in Victoria, where the Coho ferry docks, is the gateway for 500,000 tourists a year. It is shabby, an embarrassment. For almost 25 years, governments have talked about the need for improvement, and the possibilities for the area around the terminal.

The potential to create a vibrant space around Victoria's harbour that brings economic growth is obvious.

So is the need for provincial support. It's not a matter of resources — the government spent more than \$1.3 billion on the Vancouver Convention

Centre and the B.C. Place roof. The benefits don't stop in the capital; tourists who arrive through the terminal travel throughout the Island and province.

The new government should also be increasing support for the Royal B.C. Museum, a vital resource in understanding our past and a key attraction for the tourism industry. Yet provincial support for the museum is 18 per cent lower than it was 10 years ago. A government interested in both our heritage and the tourism industry would restore funding to at least the level of a decade ago.

And there is the softwood lumber dispute. Two months ago, when the U.S. announced duties of up to 20 per cent on Canadian lumber, Premier Christy Clark said she would seek a \$70-a-tonne levy on U.S. thermal coal shipments through B.C. to help pressure the American government. Nothing has come of that. While premiers from five other provinces have gone to Washington to fight the softwood duties, B.C.'s politicians have remained on the sidelines.

Finally, the new government needs to recognize that housing prices are an issue here, not just in the Lower Mainland, and that its belated measures to slow increases in Vancouver hurt affordability in Victoria. Any action on housing costs needs to meet the needs of British Columbians, not just Vancouverites.