

Nanaimo candidate wants Vancouver Island to separate from B.C.



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Robin Rich, an economist, is the first candidate to declare for the Vancouver Island Party, which wants to separate the island from B.C. [PNG Merlin Archive] PNG

A political party with a strong populist leader appealing to regional interests will likely not benefit from proportional representation as the leader of the Vancouver Island Party is hoping.

The first thing the leader of the Vancouver Island Party promises to do if he wins the provincial byelection in Nanaimo in the new year is work toward making Vancouver Island its own province.

Canada's 11th province would be called VanIsle and as such would get its fair share of public money from Ottawa, said Robin Richardson, a Harvard-trained economist, minutes before officially launching his candidacy in Nanaimo on Wednesday.

"We would be 10 times, not 10 per cent, 10 times better off as a province than as a region," said Richardson, 67, a former employee of the Fraser Institute and supporter of the Christian Heritage Party and Canadian Taxpayers Association.

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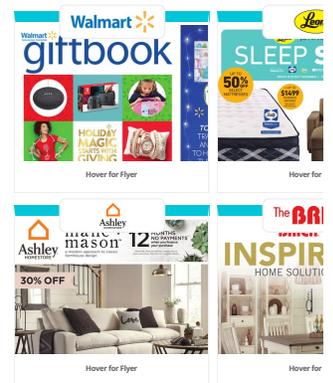
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He said Vancouver Island's 800,000 residents make up 17 per cent of B.C.'s population, but only receive one per cent of provincial money for infrastructure, transit and building projects, and far less than 17 per cent of federal money that B.C. receives for health and other program spending.

Richardson is promising free university tuition for residents of VanIsle, to diversify the economy with high-paying, green jobs, especially in the tech industry, to reduce ferry fares and only charge for vehicles, not drivers, passengers or walk-ons.

He would also charge a flat income tax and ban panhandling and tent cities from city's commercial districts.

With Ottawa's help, Richardson said he would support new First Nations housing and help Indigenous communities develop a tourism industry. He would also scrap the speculation tax in Nanaimo.

Richardson, whose previous political ambitions began and ended when he was elected as Toronto MP in the short-lived Progressive Conservative government of Joe Clark in 1979-80, promised to do all that while balancing the budget.

Richardson, an associate pastor at a Victoria church where he lives with his wife, and who has a second home in Nanaimo, also supports proportional representation, more specifically the mixed member proportional system.

"It would certainly help smaller parties like ours," he said.

But if the province changes its electoral system from first past the post to proportional representation a party like the VIP is unlikely to be elected, said an SFU professor.

Parties "strongly branded to one individual" and with a localized political following in one region, like the VIP, don't fare well under an alternate voting system like proportional representation, said International Studies Prof. Stuart Parker.

"They tend to do best under a first past the post system," he said.

He said because parties would need five per cent of a provincewide vote, as they would under the mixed member proportional system favoured by Richardson, it's unlikely they would reach that floor.

Richardson is confident he can get the votes he needs to win the byelection in Nanaimo because the four parties — NDP, Liberals, Conservatives and Greens — will split their support and he "will come up the middle."

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