

Good evening everyone. Bonsoir Messieurs et Mesdames. Pji'lasi.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Mi'kmaq language, Pji'lasi means "Welcome. Come in."

It can also mean: "Would you kindly be quiet? We have important things to talk about." So, remember, Pji'lasi

It is a distinct privilege to be invited to chair this 29th Public Policy Forum Dinner in celebration of outstanding contributions to public policy and public service in our country. This year, we will be honouring six extraordinary Canadians.

During my time as a Director of the PPF from 2001-09, I served for several years as Chair of the selection committee for this dinner. Over the years, the Forum has recognized an exceptional group of Canadian public service leaders.

Our honourees this evening add lustre to an impressive cast. They stand as exemplars to the rest of us and to our nation, representing the very best in public service, in citizenship and in leadership.

This annual dinner is famous across Canada for the people who attend. Tonight we have 1100 guests, including the Clerks of Executive Council of every jurisdiction in Canada, numerous deputy ministers, federal and provincial ministers, many senior officials, plus leaders from the academic and business communities, the media and the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors.

Someone has suggested that we have such an impressive cast of senior government people in attendance tonight that we may have one-quarter of one per cent of the people whose names appeared recently on the Ontario Sunshine List.

This dinner is known as one of Canada's leading Schmooze Fests. I hope you all received the e-mail from Ed Greenspon earlier today. If not, I can share it with you. It's not very long.

To: Attendees of the 2016 Public Policy Forum Dinner

The PPF Board has approved a new fundraising policy. Anyone in attendance at tonight's Dinner who speaks with an Executive Council Clerk, a deputy minister, a minister, a senior government official or any person of influence will be required to pay an additional \$1000 at the exit.

Failure to do so will result in forfeiture of all business cards collected during the course of the evening.

BTW, I hope you got the further e-mail that I sent by "Reply All." Don't you just love "Reply All"?

My e-mail reads, "To speak with a premier of a province of 150,000 people, we can work out a reduced rate."

Being premier of Canada's smallest province is a great gig, the best job in the world. We have all of the policy issues and operational challenges of any jurisdiction in the country. In addition to that, we have what I like to call "the advantage of scale." We know each other. Last Friday, I went to visit a woman who was celebrating her 108th birthday. When I entered her room, she knew exactly who I was and what I was doing there. Not only did Mrs. Shaw know who I was, she affirmed that she had never voted anything but Liberal during her lifetime. I said that I hoped we could count on her the next time. She said, "That's no problem. When's the election?"

One of the advantages that comes with being premier of PEI is that Islanders take an interest in public affairs. In our provincial election last year, we had a voter turnout of 82.1%. Imagine that.

But we are not resting on our laurels. In June of 2015, we presented a White Paper on Democratic Renewal. An all-party legislative committee has been hard at work preparing the way for a plebiscite to take place in November of this year, seeking the views of Prince Edward Islanders on an array of options including proportional representation, ranked ballots and the current first-past-the-post system. Depending on the outcome, PEI could be the first jurisdiction in Canada to move away from the first-past-the-post model.

One of my operating mantras as premier is “Small Can Be Big, and Nimble.” This belief underpins and animates much of what we are doing as a province and as a government.

In Canada as a whole, I believe we make a mistake in always telling ourselves that we are a big country. We’re not. In terms of relationships and coherence of outlook, we are a small, intimate country. We know each other. And we should.

You don’t have to look further than the people gathered in this room tonight for proof that Canada is a small country. We do know each other. That of course is evident in this room, where so many of you know each other and are keen to spend time together, once we get the formal business of the evening looked after. Pji’lasi. Remember.

Let me give you a few examples of our intimacy in Canada and how we matter to each other.

Last Thursday, I announced that Prince Edward Island would reverse a 30 year-old policy and provide access to abortion services in our province, through a centre dedicated to women’s reproductive health. Within minutes, I received a message of congratulations from Prime Minister Trudeau. That was soon followed by a tweeted message from Premier Kathleen Wynne. That’s how small Canada is, and how we work together.

I hope the Prime Minister or Premier Wynne won’t mind that I was at least as impressed to receive a shout-out from Gloria Steinem.

For several hours last Thursday, PEI was trending on Twitter, further proof that Small Can be Big *and* that public policy matters.

We don’t make enough in Canada of how small we are, and how relationships matter.

The red neck-tie that I am wearing this evening was worn by New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna during the 1987 election campaign that produced his historic landslide victory. That’s a further example of how small Canada is. We exchange used clothing among political leaders.

Premier McKenna’s 1987 election victory was followed by two further majority governments. That pattern was repeated on Monday of this week when Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, who chaired this dinner in 2008, won his third successive majority government. Congratulations Brad.

In February, Kathleen Wynne invited me and a PEI delegation to join her and a group of 130 Ontario government and business leaders on a Mission to India. Premier Wynne did that out of friendship. It was a great gig. We’d say that we were Canada’s smallest province and Canada’s biggest province.

Kathleen often added, “Tallest premier, Shortest premier.” Of course that’s not exactly correct. Have you ever stood beside Stephen McNeil?

BTW, Premier McNeil may not be the tallest premier for long, if you can believe the polls in Manitoba. Brian Pallister stands 6’8”.

When it comes to “firsts” among Canada’s premiers, Prince Edward Island has several distinctions:

- In 1986, we were the first province to elect a premier of non-European descent, Joe Ghiz
- In 1993, we were the first province to elect a woman as premier, Catherine Callbeck
- And in 2015, we became the first province to elect an openly gay man as premier.

At the COP 21 meetings in Paris in December, one of the first people I ran into was Glen Murray, Ontario’s Minister of Environment and Climate Change. His first quip was: “Canada’s national gay mafia.” This is a further reflection on how we do things in Canada, that we don’t take ourselves too seriously, and to recognize that we can make change on social issues and move forward, rather than constantly backtracking, as seems to be the tendency in the U.S.

The India trip was a great success. We had meetings with Prime Minister Modi, chief ministers and other political leaders of six states, and numerous leaders of Indian industry. Canada should do more business with India. We share legal systems, constitutional heritage and language. Indo-Canadians represent almost 4% of our population, more in the case of Ontario. It did not go unnoticed in India that Indo-Canadians comprise 10% of our current federal cabinet.

As Canadians, we don’t capitalize sufficiently on our relationships. Canada is small, and the world is small. We could do a lot more business with India, and with many other parts of the world.

Prince Edward Island is a successful trading province. In 2015, we led Canadian provinces with export growth of 15%. That was on top of a record year in 2014, when we also led Canadian provinces, with a 22% increase in merchandise exports. Over the past two decades, PEI’s exports have expanded at double the rate for Canada as a whole.

There are two strands to the PEI export story. The first is Food. We call ourselves Canada’s Food Island for a reason. The world has a growing appetite for high-quality, healthy food. Five of our top ten merchandise export categories are food. The second strand of the export story is diversification toward a modern knowledge-based economy and manufacturing successes. In addition to food, the other five leading merchandise export categories are: engines and turbines, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, other organic chemicals and electrical equipment.

Our work is a long way from done. On Tuesday of this week, we presented a Throne Speech with the title “Building for Sustained Prosperity.” That includes major commitments to educational excellence, to growing and rejuvenating our population, and to growing and developing our workforce. Not least among our challenges is to continue hustling and expanding our sales, building on relationships and on current and future success stories in both goods and services.

These are central challenges for Canada as a whole. We must enhance productivity, and pay more attention to demographics. We must go beyond simply talking about aging populations, to talk about what we are going to do about rejuvenation. We must prioritize public policies that encourage young people to prosper and get ahead. Canadians of all ages must see that they can get their foot on the next

rung of the ladder. That is the essential test of -- and pathway to -- sustained prosperity. Our new federal government has been elected with a mandate to expand the middle class. In the case of Prince Edward Island, I like to think of it as an opportunity for everyone to get his or her foot on the next rung of the ladder. I am proud that PEI led among Canadian provinces for year-over-year wage growth in 2015, with an increase of 3.6%.

L'environnement est devenu un enjeu critique dans notre discours et nos priorités politiques. Pour la première fois depuis toujours, il y a un consensus entre Canadiens et nos gouvernements qu'il faut faire une priorité de l'environnement et des changements climatiques. For the first time ever, the environment is a higher public policy concern among Canadians than health, education or the economy.

We can be proud that Canada's first ministers have met twice in less than four months to talk seriously about climate change, and that Canada played a prominent role in reaching global agreement in Paris. This builds on the dedicated efforts of Canada's premiers going back almost a decade, culminating in the summer of 2015 in the Canadian Energy Strategy. Many premiers have contributed to this work, none more so than Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard, who convened the meeting that led to the Quebec Declaration in April 2015.

Prime Minister Trudeau is committed, starting with the fact that Canada's first ministers have met twice since November and will meet again later this year, with climate change high on the agenda.

That's the result of political leadership, good public policy and effective federalism. Not least, it's the result of hard work.

People in this room understand that good public policy starts with hard work. The people that we will honour this evening are outstanding examples of what comes from dedication, collaboration and hard work.

Stephen Leacock put it well when he said: "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find that the harder I work, the more luck I have."

I opened my remarks with a lesson in Mi'kmaq. I must say that you've done a very good job of learning the meaning of Pji'lasi. Congratulations and thank you. By the way, the Mi'kmaq word for "thank you" is Wela'lioq.

Given that I'm wearing my kilt this evening and that yesterday was Tartan Day, I will close in Gaelic and wish you *slàinte*. This means "To your health." Let's all join in wishing good health to public service, to public policy, to the Public Policy Forum, and to Canada.