

**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS**

**BY**

**THE RIGHT HONOURABLE BRIAN MULRONEY**

**AT THE**

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE  
BRIAN MULRONEY INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT**

**AT**

**ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY**

**Antigonish, Nova Scotia  
September 18, 2019**

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When Canada was born, St. FX was 14 years old having been founded by poor farmers, fishermen and clergy in 1853.

It is therefore a special moment in my life today to participate in a ceremony marking the opening not only of splendid new buildings at St. F.X. – a place I love – but, more importantly, the beginning of grand new opportunities for young Canadians and others from around the globe to learn, lead and help build a better world for us all.

A highly impressive and generous new scholarship and bursary program will help many young students acquire the education our founders dreamt of.

I must at the outset express profound gratitude for the generosity of our donors and, in many instances, their kindness in making the long trip to be with us today. There is no way I can adequately thank you all who have made this event possible. But perhaps one day as the graduates of this new great institute make a beneficial mark on our major national and international institutions you will look back with satisfaction and whisper to yourself: “I was there to help make it happen”. My sincere thanks to you all.

When I was young in Baie-Comeau, I had a conversation with my father, late on a Sunday night when he returned from the paper mill where he worked as an electrician. He also held down a second job on his days and evenings off, wiring homes and repairing oil burners. While he did that, my mother – apart from raising 6 young kids in a tiny mill house – took in boarders to try and make ends meet.

Times were not easy and I told my father that night of the new apprenticeship program being launched at the mill, where children of employees could train as tradesmen – plumbers, mechanics, electricians and the like – while being paid a good wage and then have guaranteed future employment with the company.

My father’s reply is engraved in my memory: “I know, Brian, that times are tough and we could sure use the extra money you would bring in. But I have learned one thing: the only way out of a paper mill town is through a university door – and you are going to university.”

And that is how I wound up at St. FX.

When I graduated, our convocation speaker that day – the great Editor, Grattan O'Leary – reminded us that a good education was not principally to provide us with a standard of living, but rather with a standard of life.

When I left this campus with my classmates that day – some of whom are here this morning – to head to the big city with the bright lights, to conquer the world – or so we all hoped – I had no money, no connections and no influence.

But I had 2 things of far greater worth: a degree from St. FX and the values that had been inculcated into us by a superb faculty and university leaders, here in Antigonish.

In the Old Testament the prophet says that “young men have visions and old men dream dreams”. I can remember those days of my youth – I can remember feeling as happy and excited and ambitious as one could possibly be.

And now as I look back through the vista of the years, I can remember the accomplishments and the setbacks. I can recall the splendor of the view from the highest mountaintop and the sorrow one feels in the valley of defeat.

Life is an unending sequence of challenges from which no one emerges unscathed. Defeat is not something to fear but surrender is something to reject.

Throughout an active and sometimes tumultuous life, never once did it ever occur to me to quit. I learned on this campus that failure was not an option.

I learned here as well the true meaning of the words of President Truman when he said: “There are no great men. There are only ordinary men who rise to meet great challenges.”

And so, each time I return to St. F.X. and meet our students as I do today, I see hope for our future in this explosive and dangerous world and I see inspiration for our citizens because of the firm and able leadership emerging in this country and elsewhere around the globe.

For me, arriving at St. F.X., in the fall of 1955 – 64 years ago this month – I knew it opened the door to a wider world.

I was quite literally a boy from Baie Comeau carrying a cardboard suitcase and wearing the only blazer I owned.

And who did I meet?

The friends of a lifetime, mostly from towns and villages in Atlantic and Central Canada and the New England states and a smattering of others from around the world.

They were friends from all sides of the political aisle, and I learned then that politics ends at the water's edge, where friendship begins and endures.

At St. F.X., from outstanding professors in philosophy, history and political science, I learned about the power of ideas to transform our country, from one century to the next.

At the end of the day, I also learned that big ideas are about leadership and fundamental change.

This small university in Nova Scotia has long played a disproportionate role in Canadian politics and public policy.

The main players in Parliament are: the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Government in the Senate and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. During an extended period in the 1980s and 1990s, three of the four were St. F.X. graduates: Lowell Murray, Leader of the Government in the Senate; Allan MacEachen, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate; and me, as Prime Minister of Canada.

How good is that, for a small place in Nova Scotia?

Not to mention great Premiers, such as Frank McKenna and Angus L. Macdonald.

It is no accident that St. F.X. was named the best primarily undergraduate university in Canada for five years in a row in the annual Maclean's survey of Canadian universities. Dr. Sean Riley, our distinguished former President, and Dr. Kent MacDonald, his highly impressive

successor, have provided brilliant leadership in bringing St. FX to such a significant position among Canadian institutions of higher learning. Dr. Kevin Wamsley now follows strongly in that remarkable tradition.

And what was it about St. F.X., then and now, that attracted many of the best and the brightest of successive generations, who decided to do their university studies at a residential college, in a small town in Central Nova Scotia, far from Montreal or Toronto or New York City?

For me, and thousands like me, that's just what St. F.X. represented: Not a big city, but a big opportunity.

And today is all about how the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government can help St. F.X. enhance its role in this vital area of opportunity and leadership so as to better serve the citizens of our beloved nation and the wider world.

In March 2012, Dr. Sean Riley and Tim Lang visited me at my residence in Palm Beach and asked me to lead a campaign that would raise \$25 million for St. F.X. We began the campaign with some success but were sidelined for a while by Sean's sudden serious illness and Tim's departure for a challenging new opportunity in Toronto. Kent MacDonald soon thereafter stepped in as President and Murray Kyte as Advancement VP and the successful work continued to the very end.

And so for 6 years, I knocked on doors around the world for St. F.X. and we ultimately raised \$100 million. I was often deeply moved by the remarkable kindness of my interlocutors - including the late, great Ron Joyce – and many others who are here today. I shall never forget the magnificent assistance they gave me and this wonderful university. Your names will be inscribed on our Donors Wall with gratitude and respect, there to stay for eternity.

Je veux également remercier très sincèrement mes amis du Québec et les sociétés québécoises qui m'ont épaulées avec force et une générosité remarquable dans cette campagne de financement, tellement importante pour cette grande université.

I want to thank my incomparable and extraordinary wife Mila for her unfailing love, devotion and constant support of all my dreams, including this major one, on behalf of the university. Mila has always made everything seem easy, even when it was not. For 46 years, she has effortlessly brushed away the clouds and always found a way for us and all our children to walk in the sunshine of life.

The assistance and wise counsel of Frank McKenna was indispensable to the success of this initiative and my daughter Caroline and son Mark and old friends like Sam Wakim and Steve Hudson also helped greatly by securing major contributions at crucial moments that re-energized the campaign.

In a special way, I want to thank Premier Stephen McNeil of Nova Scotia whom I met during a long flight to South Africa for Nelson Mandela's funeral. When we discussed the Mulroney Institute, he immediately understood its importance for Nova Scotia and indicated that he and his government would actively support our efforts. We are most grateful to the Premier for his significant assistance.

Obviously, the financial support of the Government of Canada was absolutely vital to our success and I thank Prime Minister Trudeau for his genuine interest in and unflagging support of our efforts. His then Principal Secretary, Mr. Gerald Butts – whose late aunt, Sister Peggy Butts, was a most distinguished graduate of this University – was also an important supporter of this initiative. They have our deep gratitude.

This Institute is open to all and their ideas: Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, Conservatives, Greens, NDP and others, will find a home here marked by fairness, objectivity and scholarship of the highest order.

It was a high honour for me to be of some service to this special place.

The words of an Irish poet seem appropriate today:

“The past is consumed in the present, and the present is alive only because it gives birth to the future”

May the future of St. F.X. – its gifted professors, promising students, devoted staff and immutable values – continue to benefit the soul of Canada and contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world.