

Falcon stops in Nanaimo on tour of B.C.

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If B.C. Liberals choose Kevin Falcon as our next premier Feb. 26, the Surrey-Cloverdale MLA plans to insist on more public accountability by the RCMP before renewing the provincial contract with the force in 2012.

Falcon is criss-crossing the province trying to reach as many Liberal Party members as possible before the online leadership vote. Wednesday evening, he spoke to approximately 75 party faithful at the Coast Bastion Inn. It was his third visit to Nanaimo since the leadership race started.

He spoke with the Daily News prior to addressing party members one day after a report from the B.C. Civil Liberties Association highlighted sharp public discontent with RCMP policing in some rural and northern B.C. communities.

The report found, for example, that there was widespread praise for officers who walk or bike their beats, and for liaison officers. However, it documented allegations of illegal searches, racial profiling, poor interactions with First Nations, and perceptions of a lack of accountability.

"I am not going to sign a new contract with the RCMP unless there are acceptable accountability mechanisms in place," Falcon said.

He also cautioned Islanders not to get too wound up by recent comments from B.C. Ferries CEO David Hahn.

Last week, Hahn said Ferries projects a \$25-million annual shortfall beginning next year and a higher government subsidy is needed to fill the gap or 20% to 50% fare increases would be needed on some routes. Hahn, Falcon said, was trying to use the media to negotiate for a higher subsidy.

"I would really encourage people not to get too concerned about those comments," Falcon said.

However, he warned that people who live on the Gulf Islands can't continually expect the government to subsidize their choice for living in ferry-dependent communities.

"The 25,000 people who live on the Islands already receive about \$50 million in provincial subsidies," he said, indicating that's too costly for other taxpayers.