

ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN BC'S NORTHWEST

What You Said: The Issues

Infrastructure

There was widespread agreement that Infrastructure improvement was something that could greatly improve the day to day business for the people of the Northwest. The point was made that on top of the practical upgrades that infrastructure spending could provide, there are many social and cultural benefits to be derived from carefully targeted infrastructure spending. However, the most fundamental agreement on the infrastructure sub-topic was that all government dollars spent on projects in the riding are best used if local workers are given priority for the execution of the work. In terms of actually benefitting the Northwest directly there was no debate that all spending needs to directly create jobs.

There was also widespread agreement that infrastructure dollars would be well used to create cultural and recreational facilities in municipalities across the riding.

"I highly recommend to improve the highway corridor all the way to the Port of Prince Rupert... Our Northern Economy depends on this "Lifeline" to prosperity. Take advantage of idle heavy equipment and use it while you can!"

- Fiena

Furthermore, there was concern that if infrastructure funding is 'tied' to municipalities matching any federal funding, this would be greatly detrimental to the Northwest where many towns are simply out of money. The point was well made that if funding matching is required this will lead to the communities that need funding the most being passed over for municipalities that currently operate with a greater fiscal capacity. In a nutshell the matching model allows the rich communities to get richer, at the expense of those communities that need help the most.

- Infrastructure spending should make use of local labour to engage in the work and create jobs.

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- Projects should include cultural and recreational facilities; critical resources in small communities.
- Funding should not require 'matching' funds from cash strapped municipalities.

Taxes

On the topic of taxes there was a diversity of opinions. One point of agreement was that cutting taxes as a silver-bullet cure-all has proven a very ineffective approach. This approach of reflexive tax cutting is seen to be a failed strategy, especially when the recipients of the tax cuts are the wealthiest in society. There was some agreement that tax cuts targeted at low income Canadians may provide some economic stimulus. Some frustration was expressed with the huge tax cuts that some of the country's most profitable companies have received in recent years. If there are any sectors that don't need tax cuts it is those that are currently the most profitable.

- Tax cuts not always the solution
- No tax cuts for the richest corporations
- Targeted tax cuts for low income Canadians

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A New Green Economy

Here in the Northwest we have been living through economic downturn for over two decades. We are also certainly no stranger to environmental costs of the old economy; clear-cut bald spots, depleted salmon stocks, and pine-beetle devastation. The Northwest knows that the rebuilding of the economy must be environmentally sustainable if it is to provide steady livelihoods for years to come.

This message came through loud and clear at forums across the riding. It is not about choosing between the environment and the economy; economic and environmental recovery must be one and the same. The people of the Northwest had lots of creative ideas for building a green job future in the region.

- Managing our fisheries: a better funded, local area management model for the Department of Fisheries & Oceans would create well paid local jobs and lead to better ecological and economic management of our fish stocks and waterways.
- Repowering our communities: Developing renewable alternative energy sources could help create construction and technician jobs and guarantee communities clean, self-sufficient sources of energy. Participants identified wind, solar, tidal, geothermal and biomass resources that could repower the region for generations to come.
- Green Business opportunities: The Northwest could support all sorts of green businesses including geothermal greenhouses to provide local fresh food, eco-tourism projects, green home renovations and green power generation.

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Strengthening the Social Safety Net

Canada and the Northwest is built on the hard work of communities and the understanding that when neighbours fall on tough times we lend them a supporting hand to get back on their feet.

It is this principle

that guided the creation of EI, healthcare, and other elements of our social safety net. Forum participants felt strongly that in times of economic crisis we must strengthen this system which defines us as Canadians.

"I believe a priority area should be in social housing. It will be those in the most desperate situations which will feel this crisis most significantly. Investing in social housing will provide a new jobs for construction workers in the region, and will ensure that proper housing is available for those encountering homelessness." - Mae Davidson

- EI reform that works: It should be easier to qualify for EI. Government should decrease the number of hours required to qualify for EI to reflect the seasonal nature of work in the Northwest. Benefit terms should be extended to help those hurt by the serious economic downturn.
- Protect our pensions: the CPP and OAS must be protected for the many who are counting on this income to support them in their retirement.
- Education for Employment: We must invest in our education system at the post secondary level to train the workforce that will help to pull us out of the economic downturn into a knowledge economy.

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Students need support to pay off student loans. We should also focus on skills re-training especially for low-income people and those who have lost their jobs.

- **Build affordable housing:** new green housing stock could increase employment in the construction trades, use local building materials and relieve financial stress on low-income families.
- **First Nations Health:** We must invest more in healthcare in our First Nations communities including preventative programs in healthy diets and recreation facilities for kids.

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Bailouts

On the topic of bailouts there was not universal agreement. On the whole those at the Town Halls seemed reluctantly in favour of Government money going to companies so that job losses could be avoided. From the perspective of those in Northwest it is sometimes hard to watch high-paid business leaders getting millions when our friends and neighbours have received no such support. However, for the greater pursuit of saving jobs there was an acknowledgement that bailouts did have a role to play. There was agreement that all bailout money needed to be closely monitored to assess the effectiveness of the bailout. While many believed all bailouts should be repaid, others thought it was a worthy way for government to spend money should jobs be saved as a result. One interesting proposal was to create a framework whereby those companies receiving the bailouts would have to repay the government, interest free, over a long period of time should the bailout be successful in reviving said company's fortunes. It was also noted that companies in the Northwest should receive a fair share of any money the government spends bailing out struggling companies.

- Sometimes necessary to protect Jobs
- Should be repaid wherever possible
- Companies from the Northwest should get a fair share

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Small and Medium Enterprises

The people of the Northwest are famous for their independent and resilient spirit. Having faced decades of economic challenges with the decline of traditional resource sectors like mining, forestry and fishing, the region is ready for a rebirth. Key to this rebirth will be innovation and entrepreneurship to create local jobs in small and medium businesses. People who came out to the community forums had lots of ideas about how the government can support the growth of local businesses and ensure that they contribute to the economic recovery of the Northwest.

- Financing the future: we must work to ensure that credit is available to those wanting to start, grow, or maintain their business. Micro lending and flexible credit could spur job creation in small start-ups.
- Local jobs first: participants suggested we should work towards a 'made in region' approach which would use local materials and local labour to provide the maximum benefit to the region's economy.
- Export products not jobs: people are concerned about the closures of mills throughout the region while we continue to cut trees only to ship raw logs south to the United States. We need to come up with new innovative ways of adding value to our natural resource products – and jobs to our communities.
- Upgrade infrastructure: the success of local businesses depends on access to efficient and cost effective transportation and communication infrastructure. Businesses need to be able to receive orders and ship products to their customers. Possibilities for improvement include twinning of the Hwy 16, better railroad, broadband internet expansion and secure mail service.