

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

July 9, 2008

The Editor
Nanaimo Daily News

I find it unfortunate that the Nanaimo Daily News maintains a consistently pessimistic outlook on the forest industry. Your readers should have confidence that we are in the midst of building a stronger forest sector for Vancouver Island.

Nanaimo-Parksville MLA Ron Cantelon has been working from the very start to support the Harmac workers and bring government support to bear on their effort. Previous Minister of Forests and Range Rich Coleman provided funding to support their bid planning. One of my first actions as the new Minister was to meet with the workers last week, and Minister of Technology, Trade and Economic Development Ida Chong is meeting with them today. The Harmac workers have done a terrific job in bringing together a consortium to support their effort and we continue to back them.

Fundamentally, we need to remain focussed on the opportunities ahead. As just one example, wood products make up nearly 95 per cent of the value of construction materials used in residential housing. But when you look at commercial and institutional construction, it is only 19 per cent. That is a huge untapped market for our forest products – and commercial construction is less prone to cyclical downturn. That's why we need to look at changing the B.C. building code to enable greater use of wood in larger buildings and facilities, and then export that construction know-how abroad.

By working together – communities, First Nations, industry, and governments – we can ensure forestry's continued success in Nanaimo and across our province.

Sincerely,
Pat Bell
Minister of Forests and Range