

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Feb. 26, 2009

The Editor
Arrow Lakes News

Dear Editor:

I'm writing to correct the erroneous comments from Nelson-Creston New Democratic Party MLA Corky Evans in the Feb. 24th article, MLA says budget takes away from rural B.C.

Mr. Evans is wrong to suggest that the Ministry of Forests and Range field office in Nakusp will close. Let me be clear: There are no plans to scale back our presence in Nakusp. Every effort is being made to protect public services across the province. To suggest otherwise is wrong and causes unnecessary stress in these already challenging times.

Mr. Evans is wrong when he claims nothing has been done to keep skilled workers in their hometowns as we weather this unprecedented downturn. Last year, the Village of Nakusp received \$349,000 under the Job Opportunities Program to provide short-term employment for up to 13 forest workers. They're completing fuel management projects, reducing the spread of invasive plants and expanding two trail systems. Overall, the \$129 million Community Development Trust has assisted more than 3,500 people. That includes \$17 million to help 1,160 workers access up to \$5,000 each for retraining.

Here are a few other things Mr. Evans failed to mention. We're spending \$20 million over two years for resource road maintenance to protect the industry's infrastructure. We're also providing \$30 million to supplement the kinds of programs offered through the Community Development Trust.

In the longer-term, we're reducing our reliance on the U.S. market by aggressively pursuing new business in China. Since we opened an office there in 2003, exports of B.C. wood products have more than tripled. We're also building a bio-energy sector by utilizing what was previously considered waste wood. The job and revenue potential here is significant.

There's no question the road ahead will be difficult. But your readers need to know their government is providing short-term support with the goal of building a strong and competitive forest sector. I have every confidence in the industry's potential, and that we'll be well positioned when global markets rebound.

Sincerely,
Pat Bell
Minister of Forests and Range