

Business breathes a sigh of relief for Liberals

Vindication of tough early years seen as voters buy into strong economy

May 18, 2005

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Vindication. That was the spin tossed out late Tuesday night as the B.C. business community swallowed the Liberal party's return to government in a race many admitted was closer than expected. "This is going to mean a strong voice for social programs and perhaps more focus on those than the economy," said John Winter, president and CEO of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce. "But it is vindication for the Liberal government, they were re-elected on the basis of a strong economy."

The province was split along party lines during the campaign as to what was responsible for B.C.'s resurgent economy — Liberals, industry and the rest of the business community arguing strong policy played a big role, while the NDP and labour argued commodity prices and low interest rates deserved most of the credit.

Winter said there's no reason to expect anything to change in terms of economic policy, despite the strength of the NDP opposition. "They have a strong enough majority to be able to do what they want," he said. "But certainly they are more in check than in the past, we've reverted to the traditional voting patterns."

Hence the polarization of the new parliament. That means a lot of work ahead for the coast forest industry, said Rick

Jeffery, president and CEO of the Coast Forest Products Association.

"It's nice to see we have a Liberal majority because for the forest industry that's important, we need another term to keep moving forward with the policies put in place," he said, though he was quick to point out organizations like his which represents the forest companies are in for a tough four years.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us because we have a strong opposition coming in that doesn't know a lot about forestry and has some real misguided policies," he said characterizing as ideologically driven the NDP's forestry policies of the 1990s. "We have to let them know that's just not on."

Jeffery was disappointed and concerned about the lack of representation in the new parliament with the loss of Liberal MLAs on the North Island, Cowichan and Port Alberni.

But his concern was not shared by Bill Routley, president of Duncan-based Steelworkers Local 1-8C, which represents thousands of forest industry workers on the Island.

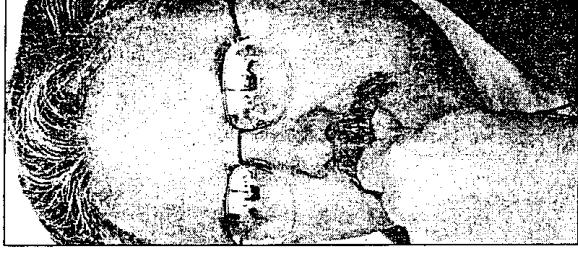
"It's wonderful news," he said while on the phone from a celebration roasting the victory of the NDP's Doug Routley (no relation) over Liberal Labour Minister Graham Bruce in Cowichan-Lady-smith. "What's happened is we've brought some balance back to the



Jeffery: NDP misguiding



Whyte: Tourism pleased



Winter: Liberals 'vindicated'



Routley: It's wonderful

province and that's good news as far as I'm concerned."

Routley said the labour movement is thrilled to once again have a voice after four years of "iron rule" by a government that "ripped up contracts and showed utter disrespect to working people and the democratic process."

He is waiting to see how the new government reacts when the coastal industry starts to see major changes being brought in by companies like Brascan and Interfor. "There has been a veil of secrecy

over plans by some of the major forest companies," he said, suggesting they have been waiting for the election to be over before making announcements of closures around the Island. "Now we'll get to see the true face of this government when operations are closed down and demand rises for more raw log exports."

Other industries like tourism and the high-tech sector were pleased the Liberals were back in government and we're looking forward to the continuity that

should bring to the economic picture.

"They've contributed a lot of money to this industry and that kind of support will continue," said Tourism Victoria CEO Lorne Whyte, citing the province's doubling of Tourism B.C.'s marketing budget with a view to doubling tourism revenues to \$18 billion by 2015.

The continuity in economic policy was also cheered by Dan Gunn, COO of the Vancouver Island Advanced Technology Centre, who noted the high-tech sector thrived under the Liberals.