

Chamber of Commerce Presentation to Federal Environmental Review Panel

August 23, 2013

Presented by Jason Ryll, President of WL & District Chamber of Commerce

Good afternoon Panel, staff, local community dignitaries, chiefs and members of the community. I'd like to thank you all for your time that you've dedicated to this project so far. Undoubtedly you've heard some moving arguments, both for and against this project. It is the position of the Williams Lake & District Chamber of Commerce that we support this proposal put forth by Taseko. In my presentation today I will re-iterate my previous points on how we've come to this position, and try very hard to put some perspective on this proposal and what it offers all of the people in our region.

Our position at the Chamber of Commerce is one of support for this project. We have supported the proposals put forth by Taseko for the mine development at Fish Lake, both in the initial proposal as well as this second one for New Prosperity. Morseo this second proposal as it preserves Fish Lake in perpetuity. Prosperity is our goal at the Chamber, for our members and therefore our communities and we believe it has many positive implications for us all.

I'd like to commend you as the Panel and staff on your willingness to explore the area while you've been here, including holding public hearings in the outlying communities. There is no doubt that the Cariboo Chilcotin area is a pristine area of the world that, we believe, the world should take note of. And believe me, the world is watching. From our mountain biking trails, hiking trails, fishing lakes,

rivers and streams there is no argument that we live in one of the most beautiful regions in the world. Raw, rugged beauty is how some would come to describe it.

And while that is true, I encourage you to consider the future of the region and how you can help transform it from raw, rugged beauty to developed, sustainable and rugged beauty. We're not Whistler, we're not Squamish and we're not the Okanagan in the development of their recreational trails and infrastructure. We have no suspension bridge tourist attractions, and I daresay that our entire tourism infrastructure in our region is challenged and edgingly, lacking. And yet now is the time when opponents of this project have floated the idea of getting involved in a struggling, niche market in tourism? I digress...

I believe we, and more intermittently you as the Panel, have an opportunity to provide our region a stepping stone in helping us to grow. We have the raw attractions, the raw beauty but what we are lacking is the infrastructure to help us get to the next level and achieve not only our tourism goals, but the goals of our communities as a whole. And you well know infrastructure comes at a cost. We all enjoy the highways to get to work or to our favourite recreational spots, we enjoy having schools opening instead of closing, and we all take advantage of health care services and hospitals which come at a cost.

Just ask the city of Detroit, which in their recent application for bankruptcy protection, I believe should serve as a proverbial wake up call for citizens, businesses and organizations that continue to expect governments to provide services, yet turn around and stall projects that help provide funding for the services they're asking for to begin with. The same can be forecast here in BC without the development and support of industry in our province. It is no secret

that governments are running out of money, yet the expectations and attitude of “well the government should provide that” is growing exponentially.

As I mentioned in my opening statements a couple weeks ago, Williams Lake is my hometown. I grew up here, went through the school system here, and continue to work, live and play here with my friends and family. My father was lucky enough to get a job at the newly opened Gibraltar mine back in 1974. My first job, back when I was 16 years old, was at the Blackdome mine southwest of Williams Lake. So I’m proud to say that mining has been a big part of my life from a very early age. While I am gainfully self-employed, the question I’m left with is “Will my sons have that kind of opportunity to be employed in industry in order for them to continue living here?” Mine was a summer job doing cleanup. What will they have? Increasingly, those opportunities seem to be disappearing without the development of industry and, up the ladder from that, the intervention and direction of government.

EDUCATION

In my first presentation to you I mentioned that there is a migration trend affecting the Cariboo. Our young people are moving away. They’re moving to pursue educational opportunities that aren’t offered here, or life interests that also lie elsewhere. The education opportunities our youth need to compete in today’s world are, to a large part, not offered in our community. While our local university is working hard to adapt to the demands of the community, and trying continually to provide the courses requested of them, they are still seeing declining numbers of students. The same holds true for our public school system.

We are going through a restructuring of our school system, affecting hundreds of students and their families, by having to close a number of elementary schools, and rejigging our high schools in order to meet the ever declining budget for our school district, and the declining number of students in our area. In short, the education isn't there because the students aren't there. And the students aren't there because the families aren't there. And the families aren't there because the jobs aren't there. New Prosperity can help mitigate that by giving people jobs that keep them or attract them to come and live in our area and thus become part of our school system.

On the topic of education, according to a new report by the Economic Policy Institute, a well-educated workforce is directly linked to economic prosperity. It's fair to note that the Economic Policy Institute is an American non-profit, non-partisan think tank, created in 1986 to broaden discussions about economic policy to include the needs of low- and middle-income workers. Their organization believes every working person deserves a good job with fair pay, affordable health care, and retirement security. While American in nature, many of their policies are transferrable to most any region in the world. One such recommendation is that the best way for regions to foster a productive economy is to invest in education to create a stronger workforce, which in turn will increase the median wage, benefiting workers and their families. These are the kinds of jobs that hang in the balance offered by projects like the New Prosperity development.

STATISTICS

On the topic of employment, as I presented before, I'd like to reiterate some troubling numbers in the labour force we have here. According to the most recent statistics from Statistics BC, the Cariboo region has:

Experienced a zero percent population growth over the past 10 years, compared to the provincial average of 1.2%.

The number of those on income assistance in the Cariboo region alone is 1.4% whereas the provincial average is 0.9%.

Those on EI in our region, as recent as September of 2012, is at 2.5%, higher than the average of 1.5%

Families with an income dependency on forestry, mining or fishing is 34%!

In a presentation made to you earlier this month, and I believe a topic that has come up repeatedly is that of the economic disparity in our reserve communities. The word that has been used is poverty. I won't mince words about it because it truly does appear to be the case, that most residents living on or near our reserve communities live in near "third world" conditions. Unemployment rates for on reserve residents are sky high. And yet, we have a mining company with a reputable record, offering to use their industries and the world's leading science practices in sustainable mining and offer jobs to those residents who live in poverty, and they fight against it? Yet opponents are not opposed to sustainable mining? To me, this does not make sense.

In fairness, mining has been described as a boom & bust kind of industry. And mine owners in the past would have been the first to agree with that notion.

However, with advances in mining and extrication, as well as scientific advancements helping mining companies achieve the most value from the rock they're already working with, the bust part of that cycle is severely lessened. It is this kind of applicable science that Taseko will be using in this project, and therefore leading the way in sustainable mining practices. This is something that all parties have admitted they want; sustainable mining.

Organizations such as AMTA, the Aboriginal Mining Training Association exist to help residents of those reserve communities, and those off reserve as well, gain the knowledge and skills needed to be the workforce for mining and more. Many of those skills offered by AMTA are transferrable skills to other industries as well. Other post-secondary institutions offer mining and mining related courses. And if I heard correctly in Dr. Meech's opening presentation, a loose proposal from UBC to create a centre to provide even more skills development and to learn, teach, and highlight the world class practices the mining industry has to offer.

SUMMARY

It's once again worth noting that the Cariboo Chilcotin region of our province is larger in land mass than many countries around the world, including all of Ireland, Great Britain, and Germany to name a few. It is home to an area of over 8 thousand lakes. And our region's history is steeped in mining. Hopefully our future will be as well.

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate a point I made earlier in my presentation and that is that our communities in the Cariboo are shrinking. They are shrinking because the people aren't here. They people aren't here, or are moving away

because the jobs aren't here. People go where the work is, which means the burden becomes heavier, and the choices get fewer for those who remain.

Once again, it's my opinion that Taseko has been held unfairly under the microscope, not because of environmental concerns but of cultural and that is not the mandate of this panel.

This proponent has undergone an unfair association of major industry projects that professional protesters are having field days with in the media recently.

There is no doubt that opponents have pulled out all the stops on reasons why this project should not move forward, on how it will affect navigable waters, how it will affect grizzly bear migration, how it will affect sasquatches... and yet opponents have also said repeatedly through this process that they are not opposed to mining. To use the old saying, that's like speaking out of both sides of your mouth.

Again, I would urge you to consider the message that would be sent to other potential investors in our province if this mine is turned down. I fear that message would be that BC is not open for business and that in turn would be devastating to our entire provincial economy, no matter where you live.

Once again I'd like to thank the panel and staff for their time in allowing me to make my presentation to you today.