
News Release

MP Byrne outlines rural economic stimulus options for government's consideration

Corner Brook, NL (January 16, 2009) – The Liberal Member of Parliament for Humber-St. Barbe-Baie Verte has given federal finance minister Jim Flaherty several ideas to stimulate the economy and effectively include rural regions of his own riding along with other rural regions of Canada as part of the nation-wide effort to kick-start the economy out of the current recession.

Byrne said that to date what he is hearing so far from most government and national leaders seems focused exclusively around the wish lists of Canada's bigger cities. Byrne is setting out to change that.

“Assistance to the auto and aerospace sectors and to building multibillion dollar high speed transit projects are important and would make a difference in turning the nation's economy around but they have absolutely no applicability to the smaller communities of this country and to the thousands of rural communities that represent the other 50% of Canada's population”, Byrne said. “These communities are home to Canadian families who are equally impacted by the economic slowdown and are just as deserving of a shot at future economic security.”

Byrne said one example of what he is proposing is for more government funding to extend high-speed, broadband internet connectivity calling it an excellent way to bring rural areas of Canada fully into the 21st century and provide short and long term jobs in the process.

“Three years ago when Harper's Conservative's came to power they cut the funding the Liberals had in place for extending high speed internet connections into rural communities”, Byrne said. “That was a mistake. Under that program, we were able to ensure tens of thousands of more rural households, schools and businesses had access to one of the most important tools of the 21st century, high speed internet. With that program now gone, the effort to expand that reach has come to a complete standstill. With spending on everyone's mind, now is the time to re-start that initiative and create hundreds of short and long term jobs in the process.”

Byrne said some of the other items that top his list for the federal finance minister include a multimillion dollar investment in community harbour development projects, a doubling of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency budget to assist in community development projects and in providing interest free loans to businesses and entrepreneurs who just can't get money from the big banks, a specific municipal infrastructure program that is specifically targeted at the needs and realities of Canada's smaller towns and communities to build roads, water, sewer and recreational infrastructure facilities, help for the forestry, mining, fisheries and manufacturing

sectors, improvements to the Employment Insurance program, along with reinvesting in federal assets and buildings such as rural post offices, RCMP detachments, and other federal buildings in rural communities that need replacement or renovations.

“I hope the government will also provide generous support for home improvement grants, for energy efficiency retrofits, as well as tax breaks for middle class families to help stimulate the spending power of Canadians in every part of the country”, Byrne said.

Byrne said that all of his ideas would make a difference to the nation’s economy and would include every region of the country in the solution including Newfoundland and Labrador.

Byrne went further.

“You know, it’s almost funny”, Byrne said. “Throughout my career, whenever our region or our province lagged behind the rest of the country economically, I called for and brought in significant economic stimulus packages that involved federal spending to build community-based, infrastructure projects. This was meant to offset and support a weakened private sector economy with targeted, public spending until the private sector was strong enough to move forward. It was a strategy to stimulate the local economy and create much needed local jobs. And it worked. I remember equally well, however, that my approach was often sharply and bitterly criticized by just about every rightwing economist, think tank and pundit in the country including the current Prime Minister as being pork barrel politics. I stuck to my guns.

But now that the economic pinch is being felt in areas of the country that haven’t experienced such negative economic times in decades, what are these same former critics and economists now calling the best economic solution to the problem: massive government spending programs to build community based infrastructure!

It was as right then as it is now. Where you stand often determines what you see and what you see determines where you stand. Perspective is everything!”

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