

# Local forestry, oilpatch reps happy with cabinet shuffle

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Forest and energy industries reacted positively to Wednesday's provincial cabinet shuffle that saw new faces in two key portfolios affecting the Peace Country.

Grande Prairie-Smoky MLA Mel Knight moved from Energy to take over Sustainable Resource Development. Ron Liepert, the former health minister, takes over from Knight.

Both industries applauded Premier Ed Stelmach's choices.

"We're very happy with the appointment of Knight. The industry very much is looking forward to working with (him)," said Brady Whittaker, president of the Alberta Forest Products Association in Edmonton.

"(Knight) is certainly very knowledgeable about the forest industry and the resource industry in general. I know he's looking forward to working with us and the issues that we have."

Wayne Roznowsky, spokesman for Grande Prairie Weyerhaeuser, said having someone local – Knight is from Valleyview – will help him understand the issues, such as mountain pine beetle infestation, that are plaguing the industry.

"That certainly makes us more comfortable. Anytime there's a change, in some way there's always potential for disruption, and a new learning curve, and getting to know a minister and a department," Roznowsky said.

"It certainly gives us some comfort to have someone from around here that certainly knows our industry very well."

But Roznowsky said there are some problems no one will be able to address directly.

"A lot of them are issues that no provincial politician can deal with completely. You talk about currency rates, the U.S. housing market, and certainly those challenges are still there."

Whittaker said having an open dialogue with Knight will be instrumental in helping change the fortunes of industry. He said the industry plans to meet with him as soon as he has had an opportunity to get up to speed on the various issues.

"The working relationship with Knight and his department is going to be instrumental on how our industry is affected," he said. "Resources for the mountain pine beetle work that needs to be done, we have to work with him to ensure funding is available, both provincially and federally."

Where Knight may have the most impact is through negotiations to create a comprehensive Land-Use

Framework (LUF), Whitakker said.

"With the issues of the LUF, we will be able to work closely with Mel, because he's from rural Alberta, he's grown up in and around the forest industry, so he's well aware of our issues, and we're looking forward to working with him to overcome them, especially the LUF."

Oil and gas industry players also reacted positively to the shuffle.

In a statement released immediately after Stelmach announced the new cabinet, Gary Leach, executive director of the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada (SEPAC) said: "We are pleased to welcome Liepert to this key economic portfolio. Calgary is Canada's energy capital so it makes sense to have the energy minister based where the majority of the sector is headquartered."

Leach noted Knight's knowledge of the issues surrounding LUF as an asset to the oil and gas sector as well.

"I think it is smart to appoint Mel Knight to Sustainable Resource Development," he said. "We are pleased to continue our dialogue with him in his new portfolio."

Rob Petrone, president of the Grande Prairie Petroleum Association, acknowledged that Knight has had a sometimes stormy relationship with the oil and gas sector, particularly after the royalty framework was implemented, and subsequently amended four times as commodity prices plummeted.

But Petrone said dialogue between the energy industry and the government improved as time went on.

"Knight, as our MLA, was faced with those challenges as a result of the recommendations the royalty review panel made, and once that was made public we worked together with the government to identify the concerns we had and we continued working through that," he said.

Petrone said the industry is ready to begin working with Liepert .

"In the time it will take Mr. Liepert to get up to speed, when it's all said and done we still need to work together with our government officials to do the right thing for everybody in Alberta."

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