



Much of what Haida Gwaii needs to power a fair

Charlotte Views: Growing a fair economy for Haida Gwaii

Haida Gwaii's resource challenges are about governance, not simply international commodity markets or a lack of capital.

[TOM KERTES](#) / Apr. 21, 2017 2:00 p.m. / [COMMUNITY](#)

Local economic issues were front and centre in last week's *Observer*.

Stories on the challenges faced by Haida Gwaii's resource sector, high levels of unemployment in many parts of the islands, lack of services (such as medical transportation for Sandspit residents in the evening and at night) serve as stark reminders that too many communities and residents are struggling.

Politicians know that talking about the economy, especially in tough times, is one way to get elected. That's why "economic growth" is the ultimate buzz phrase for anyone who wants to get your vote. But look at the three leading

stories last week: resource challenges, high levels of unemployment in some communities, and a lack of services suited to our needs. These are all economic issues, but growth is only part of the solution. Yes, Haida Gwaii's economy needs strengthening and we need more, not less, economic security. But do we need to "grow" the economy to achieve both strength and security? Not necessarily.

Haida Gwaii's resource challenges are about governance, not simply international commodity markets or a lack of capital. Locally-based decisions that respect Haida title; build on existing relationships of mutual respect at the local level; focus on serving island communities; and value the land in holistic, sustainable, and spiritual terms promise to open up all the missed opportunities when the island's resources are simply taken for production elsewhere. It is possible, especially when social-benefit capital is available, for Haida Gwaii to build an enriching and sustainable economy that fully develops the economic potential of the islands' resources. But for this to happen, the islands must be self-governed, so the place itself and people here are valued first and foremost.

Local control over local resources is not enough to address these economic challenges. A really big ("hugely grown") economy that's unfair might as well be really small for those left out. Unfair distribution of opportunity and security, evidenced by pockets of underemployment and high levels of poverty, can't be fixed simply by expanding things.

Haida Gwaii is already rich. What's needed are government policies aimed at further enriching Haida Gwaii, not to take from the islands but to respect what's already here and has been here since time immemorial. This requires building a

strong and productive economy, leadership from the ground up, putting the values of fairness and honour first and foremost, and ensuring equal government services throughout all of B.C. and Canada.



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