

October 2, 2008

The Honourable Danny Williams, Q.C., M.H.A.
Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador
P. O. Box 8700
St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador
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Dear Premier Williams:

Thank you for your letter of September 9, 2008, with your questions on behalf Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Let me begin by saying that I feel it is fundamental that when someone makes a commitment, they must keep their word. My response details at length how a new Liberal Government will meet the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador. I would note that I have not committed to all of the requests you had outlined in your letter. However, unlike Stephen Harper, when I make a promise, I keep it.

In a recent open letter to Canadians, you noted "Trust, integrity and dependability. Those are words that absolutely must apply to our country's leader. The people of Canada deserve no less." I could not agree more. Stephen Harper's broken promise to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is indefensible. Canadians need to know that their provincial and federal governments can work together and put the best interests of their citizens first. However, you can not work together when there is no trust. As Prime Minister, I pledge to restore that trust and work with you and all Premiers to further the cause and prosperity of our great nation.

Fisheries and Aquaculture

I believe that the balancing act of sustaining Canada's fishery depends on two important factors: managing the pressure placed on our fish stocks; and ensuring the economic viability of the fishing fleet pursuing those stocks.

For those struggling in areas most afflicted by dwindling stocks, a new Liberal government will invest \$70 million to help retire commercial licenses, reducing pressure on stocks and easing the way for fishers and their families to move into other industries. We will also partner with the provinces to fund an early retirement program for displaced crew members and plant workers;

Liberals will improve funding for science, surveillance, conservation and protection. We will be an aggressive voice at NAFO and will work to establish the world's first international protected area for our vital cod nursery so as to help prevent foreign over-fishing on the Tail of the Grand Banks.

A new Liberal government will do this by combining domestic measures under the Fisheries Act and the Oceans Act, with an immediate leadership role at the international level, to establish a high seas Marine Protected Area in the international waters of the Grand Banks. This area would cover the international portion of the Southeast Shoal using instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 1992 Convention for the protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic.

As Prime Minister, I would convene a National Fisheries Summit, bringing together the industry, unions, communities, Aboriginal Peoples and other levels of government to develop a modern, national fisheries strategy.

Once elected, Liberals will help modernize fishing vessels which, in turn, will improve their economic viability while reducing their environmental impact by improving their access to investment capital. This effort would start with the establishment of the \$250-million Green Fisheries and Transport Fund, which fishers can access for rebates and other incentives for technologies that will reduce fuel consumption and save money such as on-shore power facilities and engine nozzle and propeller improvements.

These commitments are on top of the \$1.7 billion for an accelerated capital cost allowance on investment in green technologies which will allow fishers to get a bigger tax deduction for being more energy efficient and polluting less.

Finally, a new Liberal government will invest \$100 million in Canada's small craft harbours, the home base of Canada's commercial fishing industry.

Equalization

First and foremost, a Liberal government will keep its word. During the last election campaign, Stephen Harper made promises to province after province, offering all kinds of deals on equalization in a cynical attempt to buy votes. It came as no surprise when Mr. Harper broke his word, and broke the trust of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I will not repeat Harper's mistake.

I will not make hollow promises to each and every province that they will get everything they want. Instead, I will promise to sit down with all provincial governments and work in a reasoned and equitable manner before making any changes to equalization formulas. This will be done by bringing all Premiers to the table, not pitting provinces against one another in the hopes of buying votes.

Energy

Even though it was Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin who signed the Atlantic Accord with you and your province, the Accord is a commitment by the Government of Canada, and not the Liberal Party. This commitment must be respected, and I remain fully committed to the Atlantic Accord.

A new Liberal government will help finance long-term green infrastructure projects such as regional energy grids. A Liberal government will be a willing partner for megaprojects such as an Atlantic Energy Corridor. The economic opportunities from infrastructure investments such as this are enormous and a Liberal government will seize them.

Defence

From its initial use as an air bridge in World War II, to a modern world-class low-level fighter training facility, Five Wing Goose Bay has a proud history and has played a vital role in Canada's National Defence. The base's tremendous infrastructure and available training airspace make it an asset that the Government of Canada cannot allow to go unused.

The previous Liberal government worked closely with the community, the unions and Serco to develop both a long-term commitment to the base, and broader investment in the community. Unfortunately, the Conservative government has made cynical promises to a community in need, and subsequently failed to deliver a single thing for the people of Happy-Valley Goose Bay.

Liberals believe 5 Wing will play a key role through the Northern Access Initiative, as approved by the previous Liberal government. Goose Bay has an important role to play in our future, and we are committed to working with the community – as we have in the past – to ensure its long-term viability.

Health

Liberals are committed to investing in an improved healthcare system for all Canadians. We will provide funding to the Atlantic Provinces for catastrophic drug costs to ensure that no-one faces financial ruin simply because they get sick.

A new Liberal government will address the shortage of Doctors by creating a Doctor's and Nurses Fund to increase the capacity to train doctors, nurses and medical technicians. We will work to remove bottlenecks that currently slow the process of licensing new health care professionals. We will also reward medical students choosing needed specialties such as family medicine, rural medicine, and geriatrics; and forgive \$10,000 per year of student debt for health care professionals who set up practice in underserved communities for a minimum of five years.

The Kelowna Accord

The Kelowna Accord was a historic consensus between the federal government, provinces, territories and Aboriginal Peoples, committing nearly \$5 billion to clear and reasonable targets to improve aboriginal health, education and housing outcomes both on reserve and off reserve. Unfortunately, the accord was scrapped by the Conservatives. Over the course of our mandate, a Liberal government will bring back the Kelowna Accord killed by the Conservative government.

Equality for Women

The Conservative government has conducted a systematic, ideologically-driven campaign to dismantle programs that help give voice to women's issues. We must now repair this damage and ensure it cannot happen again.

A new Liberal government will re-designate "equality" as the main goal of the Women's Program at Status of Women Canada. We will over-turn changes to the funding rules of the Women's Program, so that groups advocating for women's rights can again apply for resources, and will reopen the Status of Women regional offices on which women rely for assistance and information.

The Court Challenges Program which helped to remove the financial barriers that can prevent Canadians from defending their constitutional rights was callously shut down by the Conservative government. We will reinstate and double its funding.

We will also create an independent Commissioner for Gender Equality, reporting to Parliament, to ensure that legislation and policies of the Government of Canada are examined with an equality lens. Our ultimate goal is a better society for women and families – a society based on our shared Canadian values of justice and equality.

As a concrete example of my commitment to improving gender equality, I made the promise that at least one-third of the Liberal candidates would be women. I am pleased to report that the Liberal Party of Canada has exceeded that measure, fully 113 of our Liberal candidates are women, including two excellent candidates in Newfoundland and Labrador: Siobhan Coady in St. John's—Mount Pearl, and Judy Foote in Random—Burin—St. George's.

Forestry

The forestry sector is experiencing significant challenges. That is why a new Liberal government will convene a National Forestry Summit with industry, unions, communities, Aboriginal Canadians and other levels of government to develop a National Forestry Strategy.

We will also help our forestry sector improve fuel efficiency and therefore save money on fuel costs while helping them reduce emissions. We will set aside \$400 million over four years to provide refundable tax credits for industries such as forestry and farming that are achieving real, verified reductions in their emissions. A Liberal government will reward companies who adopt practices such as greener forestry management.

Our forestry sector will also benefit from an Accelerated Capital Cost Allowance, which will serve as a significant tax incentive towards upgrading their equipment to newer green technologies and thereby improving their competitive edge.

Climate Change

The Liberal green shift plan will result in substantial tax savings for the vast majority of Canadians, especially those with the lower and middle incomes. These taxes will be shifted onto pollution, allowing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to save money while reducing their emissions.

Our plan will also help the provincial government with their efforts to reduce emissions. A new Liberal government will invest \$10 billion over 10 years for Strategic Infrastructure, including clean energy grids. We will also invest \$370 million for a Renewable Power Production Incentive that will more than double the non-emitting energy sources available to Canadians.

As mentioned previously, a new Liberal Government will help our fishing and forestry sectors adapt to improve fuel efficiency. We will invest in a \$400-million Emissions Reduction Credit available to industries such as forestry and farming that are achieving real, verified reductions in their emissions.

Finally, we will establish the Green Fisheries and Transport Fund, a \$250-million program of rebates and incentives for investments in the latest technologies that will reduce fuel consumption and offer other enhancements that will modernize fishing vessels and on-shore equipment and help fishers save money on their energy costs.

Marine Atlantic

We recognize that adequate ferry service is essential for Newfoundland and Labrador, and that rising rates are a problem that needs to be addressed. We will work to establish a moratorium on rate hikes for Marine Atlantic. We will work with you to develop a long-term level of service and vessel plan. We are committed to preserving and enhancing inter-provincial ferry service on a long-term basis.

Mining

Liberals recognize the potential benefits of the project by Vale Inco for Long Harbour, and will work to ensure that the process proceeds expeditiously. We will seek to ensure that the potential impacts on the health of the community and the local environment are adequately understood and addressed before construction.

Culture

Canada's diverse arts and cultural communities plays a vital role in our national identity. Cultural activity fosters vibrant, liveable cities and communities, and supports innovation, helps us understand our past and imagine our future, and stimulates our economy.

The federal government needs to do a better job of supporting and promoting Canadian books, music and other forms of creativity. Unfortunately, we have a Conservative government that fails to see the value of arts and culture in fostering the richness of our country.

Until they were exposed by the Liberal opposition, the Conservatives were trying to give their Heritage Minister the power to censor filmmakers with a few lines buried in a 500-page tax bill. They then slashed at least \$44.5 million from critical cultural support programs.

A Liberal government will reverse these cuts and will increase funding for international arts promotion programming by \$15 million over three years to help bring Canada to the world.

Over the next four years, we will double funding to the Canada Council for the Arts, bringing its annual budget to over \$360 million. This will enable the Canada Council to make significant investments in Canada's artists, creators, and arts institutions. With this investment, we are giving Canadian artists the tools they need to create exciting, vibrant products for all Canadians.

Housing

A Liberal government will tackle the housing crisis by helping to provide for 30,000 new social housing units, and refurbishing another 30,000 existing units to make them more liveable. As part of this commitment, we will look to expand subsidies for dedicated units for low-income Canadians in federally funded co-operative housing. We will renew the Residential Rehabilitation Program and the Homelessness Partnering Initiative.

Liberals will help low-income families pay less on their energy bills. We believe every Canadian deserves to share the benefits of a greener economy. That is why we will support the building and upgrading of affordable housing for low-income Canadians, to help them reduce their energy costs through high environmental standards.

A Liberal government will also introduce a \$140-million Low-income Homes Retrofit Partnership Fund to help upgrade low-income housing across Canada, including federally administered co-operative housing, and reduce energy costs for those least able to pay.

Joint Support Ships

The previous Liberal government placed an order for three new Joint Support Ships for the Navy. However, Prime Minister Harper cancelled plans to extend the lives of the existing supply ships to avoid a gap before the ships arrive in service. Then it cancelled the order for new ships.


We will complete life extension work on two supply ships, so that they can remain active until the replacements are ready. And we will fulfill our commitment that was cancelled by the Conservatives.

Federal Presence

It is of ever greater importance to ensure that Canadians from all regions and provinces are involved in the decision-making process if we are to offer our citizens a truly representative government. There is also no reason to continue to place all new agencies and offices in Ottawa as a default. A concrete example of this is the National Ice Centre. It makes much more sense for a centre that monitors and evaluates ice movement on the east coast, to be based 2000 km from that coast. A new Liberal government will work to place the National Ice Centre in Gander which would complement the work of the Marine Centre in St. John's.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write to me with your questions. I look forward to working with you in the future on all issues of concerns to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stéphane Dion', is written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Stéphane Dion, P.C., M.P.
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada