

**Office of Jack Layton
Leader of Canada's New Democrats**



**Bureau de Jack Layton
Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique du Canada**

September 16, 2008

Honourable Danny Williams, Premier
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Confederation Building
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6
FAX: (709) 729-5875

Dear Premier Williams:

Thank you for your letter inquiring about Canada's New Democrats' position on issues of importance to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to present our party's views on these important questions. As we progress through this federal election, we want Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to be aware of our position on equalization, fisheries, energy, infrastructure and the other important issues you raise in your letter.

Atlantic Accord

New Democrats agree that Newfoundland and Labrador is the principal beneficiary of its natural resources as stated in the Atlantic Accord and we will ensure this promise is fulfilled.

As stated on my September 12th visit to St. John's, as Prime Minister, I will fully honour the Atlantic Accord. It was a commitment made to the people of Newfoundland & Labrador, by the Prime minister of Canada on behalf of the government of Canada. It is essential that the Prime Minister keep his word and honour his obligations.

The fulfillment of the Atlantic Accord remains a key plank for New Democrats and is an area of common ground and common resolve between your province and our party. Reform of equalization must fully respect the Atlantic Accord.

Energy

New Democrats have a comprehensive strategy which is outlined more fully in the section dealing with climate change later in this letter.

Specific to Newfoundland and Labrador, New Democrats continue to fully support the province receiving 100% of its offshore oil and gas revenues as “principal beneficiary” in keeping with the intent of the Atlantic Accord. We also support new legislation to require offshore lease holders to develop their holdings within a specified time as a condition of keeping their licences.

Our party also re-affirms support for the view that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador should have an ownership stake in offshore oil and gas as an equity partner and commend the province on its recent breakthrough in achieving an equity share as part of the agreement to develop the Hebron Project. We believe that the Government of Canada, as an equity partner in the Hibernia project, has more than recouped its investment and should work towards transferring its 8.5% equity share in Hibernia to the Province. The terms of such transfer would be subject of negotiations which should recognize the “principal beneficiary” intent of the Accord.

We would make these issues an important priority in any negotiations which might take place with other parties in a new Parliament.

New Democrats continue to push for the development of a national power grid for electricity. This would increase Canada’s energy security and facilitate development and distribution of renewable energy to provinces currently dependent on fossil fuel. It would also give hydro-producing provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador access to energy markets, to maximize benefits.

We support green energy development as a key part of meeting our international climate change commitments. This includes projects like the Lower Churchill hydro electric project, if done in an ecologically sound manner, can help meet our Kyoto commitments and be developed for the primary benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Under these criteria, we re-affirm our support for the federal government providing an investment guarantee as a part of the development of this renewable resource and in support of the benefits of this project to Canada as a whole.

Fisheries and Aquaculture

It is clear that there is a need for both federal and provincial governments to co-operate on a solution for fishery workers displaced by the failure of fish stocks and globalization. Fishery and forestry workers in Newfoundland and Labrador have been devastated by resource failures, plant closures, punitive tariffs, high fuel prices and competition from cheap labour abroad. It’s clear that relief is required for workers and industries impacted by these circumstances. As far back as 2004, at a meeting with the FFAW-CAW, I endorsed that Union’s proposal for a cost-shared retirement and licence buyout program for fishery workers.

It is time for the federal government to work with the provinces and fishing communities on a better strategy. The people of the province must have greater input in fisheries management to preserve stocks being decimated from overfishing.

What is needed is a community-based, co-management approach to maintain fish resources and a sustainable fishing industry that includes an overall approach based on transparency and locally derived science that makes the community, industry and DFO accountable for the maintenance of the resource.

The international fishery and over-fishing on the continental shelf is of great concern to all of us who value the sustainability and long-term economic viability of the fishery. New Democrats support Canada's custodial management of the continental shelf outside Canada's 200-mile limit—the Nose and Tail of the Grand Banks and the Flemish Cap. Peter Stoffer, NDP MP for Sackville-Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia, has advocated for this as a member of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, and was instrumental in the Committee's unanimous report urging the Government of Canada to take action on this matter.

I commend your government for the plan to create a seafood marketing council with industry and federal government participation, to promote Newfoundland and Labrador's fishery assets and products and gain more access to international markets. New Democrats support a stronger federal government commitment to negotiate better tariff terms to enhance access for Canadian seafood products in international markets

We recognize that the seal harvest provides valuable employment and income for aboriginal Canadians and fishermen and their families in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and Nunavut.

New Democrats support a commercial seal harvest that is as humane as possible, market driven and sustainable. We also support increasing the observer distance for the safety of both the observers and the sealers. We will work with industry to defend the seal fishery at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Canada's New Democrats are committed to a revised and modern fisheries act. The federal government's introduction of a new fisheries act last year left far too many loopholes in the legislation that would place the fishery and its habitat at risk. If we are to sustain recreational and commercial fishing for years to come, we must develop stronger conservation and protection measures and ensure fish and fish habitat come first. New democrats also had concerns with 15 year allocation periods, changes in how licenses are approved, and Fisheries Management Agreements that may lead to the privatization of a public resource. We want to ensure the survival of independent owner/operator fleets and work closely with industry and fish harvesters to develop fair criteria for allocations, recognizing historical dependency and adjacency.

Our party supports the growth of sustainable aquaculture, which provides economic opportunities in rural areas. Experience elsewhere in Canada points to the need for the most stringent practices to protect wild species and habitats, including those of Newfoundland and Labrador. Our party supports federal and provincial investment in infrastructure and R&D, and a national aquaculture framework, in order to achieve a safe, sustainable industry. Details of support through a comprehensive aquaculture framework agreement would be worked out through federal provincial negotiations.

It is patently unfair that in 1999, retiring fish harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador were levied an excessive amount of income tax on their license retirement payouts under the Atlantic Groundfish License Retirement Program, in contrast to fishers who sold their licenses in other years. We will continue to work to reverse the Canada Revenue Agency decision that inappropriately took this tax money from fish harvesters and their families.

Defence

New Democrats recognize the importance of 5 Wing Goose Bay to the economy and employment in Central Labrador and re-affirm our support for continued military use of the Base for training, along with efforts to develop alternative activities on the Base, consistent with Canada's defence strategy, to diversify the economy. Federal commitments to increase the Canadian Forces presence in Goose Bay and the province should be kept, especially in light of the potential impact of global warming on Canadian sovereignty in the North.

New Democrats are willing to consider options for stationing a territorial defence battalion at CFS St. John's.

We also support the call for a comprehensive review of the Air-Sea Search and Rescue capabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador which have been recently criticized for slower response times after day-time hours when fishing boats have been in distress and crew in need of rescue. There are several incidents over the past few years where loss of life has occurred and questions have arisen as to the ability to respond quickly while operating with on-call crews.

New Democrats also favour increased support for returning service personnel who need more support than they are now receiving after deployments overseas.

Health

New Democrats are committed to training more doctors and nurses, cutting wait times, halting creeping privatization and investing in long-term and home care for an aging population. This election, we will release a plan to modernize public health care and our team has led the way in Parliament with a number of significant actions to improve the system for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and all Canadians.

New Democrats launched a plan to phase in universal prescription drug coverage to protect today's families from soaring costs—including measures to reduce drug costs at source, such as national bulk-buying and drug patent reform.

We pressed the federal government to work with provinces to create training spaces for more doctors and nurses—and tabled the Creating Fair Opportunities Plan to speed up recognition of credentials for tens of thousands of foreign-trained health professionals.

Our team exposed and challenged Harper's failure to stop US-style privatization—calling for reliable federal funding linked to provincial commitments not to subsidize the expansion of for-profit care.

New Democrats consistently advocated more long-term care spaces and expanded home care coverage—to offer seniors dignity in their later years and take pressure off scarce hospital beds.

Reliable, increased federal health transfers must also address the serious health care deficits in First Nations communities across the country, including in Newfoundland and Labrador. In December 2007, New Democrats in Parliament successfully passed a motion enshrining "Jordan's Principle," which ensures that First Nations members will no longer be denied access to medical care and essential services while governments are negotiating about who should pay the bills.

We also led the way on disease prevention—including passing a law controlling toxic phthalates; tabling legislation to create a breast implant registry; launching the Children’s Health and Nutrition Initiative; calling for funding to replace unsafe water systems; and promoting a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy.

Equality for Women

New Democrats have always stood side-by-side with women’s groups to support equality. We have spoken out on a range of issues including choice on abortion, breaking the silence on violence against women, electing the first female leader of a federal political party, pushing for proactive legislation on pay and employment equity and making sure that every piece of legislation is examined for its impact on women. Women make up 41% of the NDP caucus – the highest proportion of women Members of Parliament in Canadian history.

New Democrats introduced the Early Learning and Childcare Act, which would have finally established licensed child care as a national program governed by same principles as the Canada Health Act: quality, accessibility, affordability, and universality. This act came within one vote of transforming childcare in this country.

The NDP has been demanding the reinstatement of the Court Challenges Program since Harper’s Conservatives cancelled it shortly after taking office. We are all too aware of the impact of its loss on all Canadians, but particularly women, seniors and those with disabilities who may be unable to afford court costs for their human rights issues.

New Democrats have also developed a 6-point Fairness for Women Action Plan that includes policies for fairness for women at work; a better work-family balance; an end to violence against women; making sure women are heard—in public and politics; fairness for marginalized women; and equality for women around the globe.

Forestry

This election, New Democrats have a plan to work with governments, industry, labour and First Nations for a sustainable, community-supporting forestry sector.

We’ve set out a prudent, responsible, step-by-step plan to strengthen and renew Canadian manufacturing, through smart investment, stimulating innovation, fairer trade policies, a Jobs Commissioner to investigate shutdowns; train new and displaced workers through a Green Collar Jobs Fund that will create over 40,000 jobs; and stop the export of Canadian jobs overseas through new, manufacturing-friendly trade policies while adopting a Made-in-Canada procurement policy for the federal government and its agencies.

Climate Change

New Democrats’ Better Environmental Plan implements a new energy economy strategy and builds on the Climate Change Accountability Act I proposed and was adopted by Parliament on June 4, 2008. This bill sets the target of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and provides the enforcement tools needed to do the job.

Our plan introduces Canada Environment Action Bonds to raise capital for the plan’s goals and we’ll make polluters pay for the real costs of pollution through a cap-and-trade system that rewards big polluters who reduce emissions, and punishes those who don’t.

We will help families make the transition to a sustainable economy with a \$750 million green-collar jobs fund, and ensure greener homes and cities with an average of almost \$1 billion a year for public transport and an energy efficiency retrofit program.

New Democrats will also continue our fight to halt new tar sands development until emissions are capped.

Marine Atlantic

New Democrats stand firm in our position that the federal government has a constitutional obligation to maintain the ferry service that links Newfoundland and Labrador to the rest of Canada. We re-affirm our commitment to maintaining Marine Atlantic as a crown corporation and to providing stable funding to this service. As part of our commitment to a national ship-building strategy we would work to address the building of new ferries. Recent and past rate increases have caused difficulty for residents and discouraged tourism, and our party continues to support an examination of a significant rate reduction, along with an exploration of ways to enhance Marine Atlantic's revenue.

Mining

New Democrats support development of new mining projects that are developed in an ecologically sound manner and operate under the highest environmental standards. Too often mining companies have left environmental degradation behind once profitability declined and the public paid the cost of cleanup or endured the environmental or health consequences. We oppose the use of fresh water lakes as tailing ponds and oppose the exemption for Duck Pond and Sandy Pond in Newfoundland and Labrador from DFO's Mining Metal Effluent Regulations prohibiting their use as toxic waste dumps and the establishing of negative precedents for other operations across the country.

Penitentiary

The establishment of a new penitentiary in Newfoundland and Labrador to house inmates serving federal time and enhance programming to rehabilitate offenders is long overdue. New Democrats commit to working with your government to come to an acceptable funding arrangement so that the existing facility at Her Majesty's Penitentiary can be replaced as quickly as possible.

Culture

Canada's New Democrats remain strongly in support of arts and culture initiatives that help to promote Canada's cultural identity both at home and abroad and we condemn the recent Conservative funding cuts to arts and culture programs vital to Canadian artists.

New Democrats have a comprehensive plan aimed at defending the rights of artists as well as protecting Canadian consumers. Our Party is committed to fighting to reverse efforts to legislate censorship (as demonstrated by Bill C-10) and reversing the government cuts to arts programs.

We will introduce better rules around Canadian content, increase public funding for the arts and support to artists, and ensure high quality made-in-Canada shows for everyday Canadians to enjoy.

New Democrats will move to end the practice of price gouging and "net throttling", preventing a two-tiered internet and stopping the big telecoms from ripping off consumers.

We will strengthen public broadcasting and providing stable long-term funding for the CBC and Radio Canada.

New Democrats will also ensure that any new copyright reform legislation must fairly address compensation for artists and must include proper consultations with stakeholders, including artists and artist groups, educators, software innovators and consumer groups.

Air Access

We continue to support efforts to repair and restore key transportation infrastructure in Newfoundland and Labrador as part of our commitment to addressing transportation infrastructure needs across the country. Infrastructure funding needs federal and provincial participation to provide stability and enable long-term planning.

New Democrats are also open to undertaking necessary steps to address unfair airline/airport fees and rents; improve the Airport Capital Assistance Program for small and regional airports, and work toward improved Blue Skies Agreements and support inter-lining by airlines.

Housing

New Democrats have long called for a national housing program and we developed a Housing Bill of Rights to enshrine the rights of all Canadians to adequate housing.

We have also successfully pressured Harper to abandon cuts to homelessness and housing initiatives and re-wrote the 2005 Liberal budget redirecting much of the \$1.6-billion taken out of corporate tax cuts to support affordable housing instead.

Unfortunately the existing programs end with no federal money after April 1, 2009. These programs would continue or be replaced as part of a new national affordable housing strategy of the New Democrats. Canadians everywhere would benefit, but these programs would be of particular benefit in the St. John's metropolitan area where increased pressures and needs exist because of rising housing costs.

Water Bomber funding

The federal government has a responsibility to assist provinces in protection of Canada's natural environment, resources and communities from the effects of natural disasters and climate change. This includes cost-shared arrangements to maintain our forest fire protection capacity across the country.

Joint Support Ships

Our party supports the development of a Canadian shipbuilding strategy and has strongly endorsed a National Shipbuilding Policy as developed in cooperation with the Marine

Workers Federation and the industry to ensure ships used in Canadian waters are Canadian built.

A national strategy could provide stable opportunities for facilities such as the Bull Arm fabrication site and the Marystown Shipyard, with secure jobs and spin-offs for Newfoundland and Labrador communities. A national strategy will prevent occurrences such as the sudden federal cancellations of the Joint Support Ships project and tenders for new Coast Guard vessels at a time when Canada needs these ships. The New Democratic Party would seek to have these projects proceed.

Federal Presence

The disproportionate loss of federal spending and employment in your province is unacceptable. The greatest loss is seen in senior decision making roles that also represent provincial interests in Ottawa. We've seen the Public Service Commission Office closed, and as of yet, unfulfilled commitments for expansion at 5 Wing Goose Bay.

We were against the closure of the Gander weather office and supported its reinstatement. I personally signed the PSAC petition in St. John's calling for its reinstatement during the last election and agreed to present the petition to Parliament.

We recognize the need for greater fairness in the distribution of federal jobs throughout the country and also recognize the economic importance of such a presence. New Democrats continue to be concerned by the number of jobs and services that have been reduced in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are committed to reviewing policies that led to such result and we re-affirm our commitment to working with your province to ensure fairness and full access to federal government program delivery and services in this province.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share New Democrats' views on these important matters. Please be assured of our understanding of the difficulties faced by Newfoundland and Labrador as it pursues greater economic and social progress.

I firmly believe that your province and all of Canada would benefit greatly with the implementation of our policies and programs for the economy, healthcare and the environment, among others. Our budget amendment bill (C-48) has provided significant resources for Newfoundland and Labrador, for transit, affordable housing and post-secondary education. We look forward to continuing to deliver concrete results for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Layton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning and a large loop at the end.

Jack Layton
Leader, Canada's New Democratic Party