

Jack Layton

NDP  NPD

FAX/TÉLÉCOPIE

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NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA - NOUVEAU PARTI DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CANADA

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April 18, 2011

Honourable Kathy Dunderdale, M.H.A., Premier
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Confederation Building
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

FAX: (709) 729-5875

Dear Premier Dunderdale:

Thank you for your letter inquiring about the position of Canada's New Democrats on issues of special importance to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are proud of our comprehensive platform of practical steps to provide leadership for all Canadians and are pleased to address the specifics of the questions you raise.

As we progress through this federal election, we want Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to be aware of our policies and position on fisheries, fiscal arrangements, child care, search and rescue, energy infrastructure and the other important issues raised in your letter.

The development of the Lower Churchill at Muskrat Falls is a project of significant national importance and federal support for this green energy project has been a matter of common ground between your government and our party for a number of years, and will be addressed specifically later in this letter.

Fisheries

New Democrats decry the de-emphasis on fisheries by the Conservative Harper government signaled by the planned decrease in capital funding of \$100 million and a \$44 million reduction in program spending in this year's budget and a planned spending cut in the next 3 years of a further \$85 million due to strategic review.

We have significant concerns that this will lead to further deterioration in the Fisheries and Oceans Science Branch at a time when Intensified scientific activity is required because of the need for eco-management certification as part of modern marketing and out of concern to ensure that our fishery is sustainably managed.

It is time for the federal government to work with the provinces and fishing communities to develop a better strategy. The people of the province must have greater input in fisheries management to ensure a sustainable and productive fishery. The Science Branch of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans needs enhancement not neglect.

An NDP government will ensure that adequate funding and human resources for the DFO Science Branch is available to guide management of this precious resource to achieve sustainable resource management.

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The NDP recognizes the important role the fishery has played in the historic, economic and cultural development of Newfoundland and Labrador. We also know that the future of the fishery is vital to the future of this province, and particularly in rural communities.

We believe that nearly 20 years after the cod moratorium the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and in particular those families and communities that have relied on the groundfish industry, deserve to know why there has not been a successful recovery and rebuilding of these valuable fish stocks. The future and viability of rural life in Newfoundland and Labrador depends on it.

We will establish a Royal Commission to study the question and will seek answers and recommendations as to what needs to be done.

It is also clear that both federal and provincial governments must co-operate on a solution for fishery workers displaced by the failure of fish stocks and the impact of globalization and overcapitalization. Fishery, and indeed 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 license buyout program for fishery workers and we continue to support this approach. We also endorse the province's program for a 70-30 federal-provincial early retirement and license buyback program for workers impacted by restructuring in the fishing industry.

I commend your government for its continued efforts to face the challenges of seafood marketing and an NDP government will participate with industry and the province to promote Newfoundland and Labrador's fishery assets and products to help gain more access to international markets. A New Democrat government will provide a stronger commitment to negotiate better tariff terms to enhance access for Canadian seafood products in international markets.

Our party is committed to the principles of adjacency and historic participation as both the guiding and primary considerations in future resource allocation decisions of government and supports the allocation of shrimp quotas to provide maximum benefit to communities. We believe that such principles should be embodied in a new fisheries act.

Canada's New Democrats are committed to a revised and modern fisheries act. If we are to sustain recreational and commercial fishing for years to come, we must develop stronger conservation and protection measures to ensure fish and fish habitat come first.

Seal Harvest

New Democrats support a commercial seal harvest that is market driven and sustainable and as humane as possible. 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. We believe that the development of

markets is important to the viability of this industry and support these efforts. We will also work with industry to defend the seal fishery at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Lower Churchill Development

New Democrats applauded the announcement last fall of the inter-provincial agreement between your government and the Government of Nova Scotia, and your respective energy corporations, regarding the development of the Muskrat Falls phase of the Lower Churchill River Development.

We recognize the great contribution this project will make in helping meet climate change abatement goals. The project will significantly reduce greenhouse gases, lower the use and dependency on fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, and open the door to greater use of alternative energies such as wind and solar. It is impressive that one result of this project will be the renewable sources for 98% of electricity energy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As previously committed to in letters written in 2006 and 2008 to then-premier Danny Williams, we once again re-affirm our support for the Government of Canada providing an investment guarantee for this development. An NDP government will provide a loan guarantee in order to enhance the viability of the Muskrat Falls Project and, in addition, would commit to invest \$375 million in the Maritime Transmission Link from the 3P Canada Fund and our Green Infrastructure Program as a foundation for a green energy grid in Atlantic Canada.

The cooperation between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as the involvement of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, serves as an encouraging model for other provinces and the federal government in a longer term plan to build a national power grid while recognizing and respecting provincial jurisdiction.

Federal Transfers

New Democrats know that successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments have chipped away at transfers to the provinces. The 2007 changes to the allocation methodology for the Canada Social Transfer, as cited in your letter, and the unilateral decision by the federal government in 2009 to change the formula of the equalization transfer for the Atlantic Accord, costing Newfoundland and Labrador a \$1.6 billion reduction, are two examples of this concerning trend.

The NDP believes that the federal government has an obligation to ensure that the provinces receive transfer payments that account for the unique challenges to service delivery in each province and that the real costs must be recognized. As such, an NDP government will work with the provinces and territories to achieve this goal, while establishing sustainable, adequate and predictable funding.

We believe one of the most important tasks of a new government in Ottawa is the renegotiation of the Canada Health Transfer after the current agreement expires in 2014, and we are committed to an annual 6% increase for health care funding. However, as the champions of medicare in Canada and staunch defenders of the public system, we will seek guarantees from provinces and territories to ensure the integrity of the public system.

We also recognize the onus on the federal government to engage the provinces and territories in the federal transfer process and will seek to meet soon after the formation of a new government to commence this important process.

Child Care

A New Democrat government would work with the provinces and territories to establish and fund a Canada-wide child care and early learning program, enshrined in law, establishing licensed child care as a national program governed by the same principles as the Canada Health Act: quality, accessibility, affordability, and universality.

The immediate first steps would include the following goals:

- The creation of 25,000 new child care spaces per year for the next four years;
- Improvements to community infrastructure to support the growth of child care spaces;
- The creation of integrated, community-based, child-centred early learning and education centres that provide parents with "one-stop shop" for family services.

New Democrats recognize the intrinsic link between adequate, affordable and accessible child care services and equality for women. We commend the initiatives taken by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador over the past several years to address the presence of inequalities that disproportionately affect women, such as the province's anti-poverty strategy and the province's campaign to end violence against women. An NDP government will work with Newfoundland and Labrador to further its work by providing federal support for these and other initiatives, including child care.

Offshore Occupational Health and Safety

New Democrats support Recommendation 29, made by Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry Commissioner Robert Wells, to establish an Independent Safety Agency to regulate safety in the offshore of Newfoundland and Labrador.

New Democrats have always been at the forefront in advocating for workplace and environmental safety, and an NDP government would work in cooperation with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, to ensure that appropriate legislative and administrative changes are made as soon as possible to establish a separate agency to regulate safety in the offshore.

Search and Rescue Response Times

In my letter to then-Premier Danny Williams in September of 2008, I affirmed our support for a review of search and rescue capabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly with regard to the concerns with after day-time hours response times. Just several months later, in March of 2009, the tragic Cougar helicopter crash served as another painful reminder of the dangers faced by workers who make their living at sea.

Since then, my colleague Jack Harris, the Member of Parliament for St. John's East and our Defence critic, has taken up the challenge and championed this cause. He obtained standing and participated in the Offshore Helicopter Safety Inquiry established by the CNLOPB, and argued convincingly for improvement to search and rescue response times.

Through Jack's hard work and initiative as a member of Standing Committee on National Defence, the Defence Committee has undertaken a study on search and rescue response times and has already held hearings in Gander and St. John's to learn first-hand the concerns expressed by fishermen, offshore workers, officials such as Helicopter Safety Inquiry Commissioner Robert Wells and the Minister of Natural Resources for your government.

The Defence Committee was told repeatedly that lives have been lost waiting for SAR helicopters and learned that Canada lags significantly behind other countries when it comes to search and rescue response times.

In our 2011 election platform, Canada's New Democrats commit to bringing search and rescue response times in line with international standards, and an NDP government will make implementation of this policy a priority by reallocation of resources within the defence budget.

Hibernia Shares

Our party re-affirms its support for the efforts of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to have an ownership stake in offshore oil and gas as an equity partner. We commend the recent success of the government of Newfoundland and Labrador in achieving an equity share as part of the agreement to develop the Hebron Project and other new developments.

We believe that the Government of Canada, as an equity partner in the Hibernia project, has more than recouped its investment which was designed to help kick-start the project and should negotiate the transfer of 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 Atlantic Accord and the fact this share was never intended to create a windfall for the government of Canada. To date, the Conservative Harper Government has failed to recognize these principles in its dealings with Newfoundland and Labrador on this issue.

An NDP government will move quickly to resolve this issue.

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 Goose Bay 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 and its effect on Canada's northern strategy.

Our party supports the creation 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.

Within the existing budget, the NDP will establish an annual fund for government shipbuilding. This would provide stability to the industry and include construction of new ships for the Navy and the Coast Guard.

Such a national strategy could provide stable opportunities for facilities such as those at Bull Arm and Marystown, with secure jobs and spin-offs for Newfoundland and Labrador communities. A national strategy would ensure construction of the Joint Support Ships and new Coast Guard vessels at a time when Canada needs these ships.

We will maintain the current planned levels of Defence spending commitments, and we will equip the Canadian military to resume leadership in United Nations peacekeeping operations, with major new missions reviewed and approved by the House of Commons.

As committed above, the NDP will improve search and rescue capability to international standards within the current budgetary framework.

Federal Presence and Spending

New Democrats 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.

The disproportionate loss of federal spending and employment in Newfoundland and Labrador is unacceptable. The greatest loss is seen in senior decision making roles that are also of key provincial interest in the national government 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 are committed to reviewing and reversing policies that led to such a result and we reaffirm our commitment to working with your province to ensure fairness and full access to federal government program delivery and services in this province.

New Democrats continue to be concerned by the number of jobs and services that have been lost or reduced in Newfoundland and Labrador and want to ensure that any program review or strategic review does not make this problem worse.

Broadband

New Democrats are committed to ensuring that all Canadians, no matter where they live, will have access to quality high-speed broadband access.

We recognize the potential of broadband access to help deal with the challenges faced by dispersed rural populations and provide access to knowledge and communications and a robust digital economy.

We will apply the proceeds from the advanced wireless spectrum auction to help finance the cost of this program and will also expect the major Internet carriers to contribute financially to this goal.

We also support "net neutrality" and will enshrine it in law, and put an end to price gouging and "net throttling," with clear rules for Internet Service Providers, enforced by the CRTC.

New Democrats led the recent campaign against usage-based billing by Internet Service Providers, and an NDP government will ensure that this is prohibited in all forms.

A New Democrat Government will be pleased to work with the Newfoundland and Labrador government in a bilateral agreement to achieve the goal of full broadband coverage.

Correctional Services

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.

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 from the implementation of our policies and programs for the economy, healthcare and the environment, among others.

I commend our full platform document for your review. It contains significant benefits for all Canadians and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will be interested in our plans for students, seniors, those in need of affordable housing, better employment insurance, programs in support of small business and employment and other important measures.

It is a platform of practical first steps toward a better and fairer Canada and we look forward to continuing to deliver concrete results for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sincerely,



Jack Layton
Leader, Canada's New Democratic Party