

NEWS

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Checking out Lab. West 🚗

Jones spends week in Labrador to observe and listen

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The Aurora

Spending time in Labrador visiting various groups and companies provided the Liberal Opposition Leader with important knowledge and a firsthand feel for what's happening in the Big Land.

Yvonne Jones spent half of last week in Labrador West and says she wants the people to know she is concerned about what's going on in the area; especially the fallout from the downturn in the economy that has hit the twin mining towns.

"I wanted to meet with the unions and IOC, so I would have better understanding of things in light of the postponement of the expansion project (IOC) and the layoffs at Wabush Mines," she said of her visit. "I wanted to be able sit and talk to people firsthand."

The reality of what hundreds of lost jobs means in Labrador West certainly wasn't lost on Jones.

"At Wabush Mines there I am told that among the 130 unionized workers who are losing their jobs are averaging about three to five years with the company," she noted. "Given that I take it to mean we are dealing a lot with the younger of the workforce, people of an age that have young families, mortgages, loans and coping with education costs for their children."

Jones says it is a priority of hers to encourage the provincial government to get some projects off the ground as quickly as possible, so those displaced workers have some work possibilities to help them through this down period.

"Most of these people don't have the option to just get up and leave," she pointed out. "We'd like to make it so they can get some employment in this area and there are many needed projects in this area that would help that. As far as I am concerned the hospital project should be ready to go. They should be able to call the tenders on that this spring and have it out. Construction should be started at the beginning of the season as well as construction on the college. And they can finish the Trans Labrador Highway, the widening and the paving of that highway."

Time for TLH action

There are many things on Jones' lobby list for government and she says, now that the federal budget has allowed for extra money in infrastructure funding the provincial government can rise to the opportunity.

"What we are asking government to do is come up with your 50 per cent or 40 per cent, whatever it takes to access the infrastructure money from the feds to complete the TLH and get that work on the go," she said. "I mean we have contractors with dozens of pieces of equipment in this town sitting idle with no work. Here we are with a couple of hundred people with no jobs. We can get this economy moving in this area with projects like this."

Big Land apathy

Jones says she isn't sure where on the government's priority list Labrador lies, but says there have been several indicators that show it's not too high up there.

"This is a government that removed itself in many ways to what's happening in Labrador," she said of the Williams administration. "I mean, they closed the mill in Grand Falls and six Cabinet ministers were on a plane out there with an aid package the next day. And you lose 130 jobs in this area as well as 200 or so contractual jobs and not one government minister even shows up here to meet with these people. So, Labrador is not a priority on the agenda of this government. What they need to realize is these mining operations have been sustaining the rest of this province over the years and now they are going through a bit of a hiccup because of the state of the markets and the global economy; the least this government could do is put in some infrastructure money to get these projects going to keep things rolling along."

Hospital not a priority

Jones says she feels the frustration of the people of Labrador West regarding the delays with the construction of a new



Provincial Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones

hospital and questions where that critical project lies on the government's priority list.

"In my world if you are on a priority list, you are getting done right away," she said. "It seems the government dragged its heels on this project for far too long. They announced the hospital here in Labrador West the same time they announced the long-term care centre for Goose Bay. The long-term care facility will soon be ready to open and we still haven't seen ground broken here in Labrador City. I just don't think the commitment is there. I don't think they have made it a priority in anyway and are just paying lip service to people."

Silent MHA

Jones says she has never witnessed, to date, Jim Baker speaking on Labrador West issues in the House of Assembly.

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