

Jones brings list of suggestions to finance minister

Opposition leader Yvonne Jones is seeking action from the provincial government to improve infrastructure and affordable living on coastal Labrador during a pre-budget consultation in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Jan. 26.

"I was pleased to have the opportunity to present these issues directly to Finance Minister Jerome Kennedy as he prepares his budget," said the Cartwright-L'Anse au Clair MHA. "There are very distinct challenges being faced in my district and I am hopeful that government will act to address these issues in the coming months."

Ms. Jones presented the following 11 issues that were highlighted as priorities by her constituents:

- *Reducing diesel energy costs to commercial customers*

Businesses on the coast of Labrador pay triple or quadruple the amount paid for electricity than other regions of the province. Rates should be established that are comparable with the rest of Labrador.

- *Availability of power*

Government should look at replacing diesel power with a cheaper, more reliable power source. If the capacity of power from Churchill Falls to Happy Valley-Goose Bay increases, a transmission line to the south coast should be examined. There should also be consideration of developing a hydro project on the south coast of Labrador.

- *Ferry service*

The next phase of the Trans-Labrador Highway will be opening this year and the ferry will serve all of Labrador, not just the 5,000-6,000 people on the south coast. We need a year-round ferry service to the Island and an alternate suitable winter port on the Newfoundland Straits to dock the ferry from January to April.

- *Trans-Labrador Highway*

A paving schedule should be outlined for the next 10 years on what sections will be paved each year.

- *Pave road to Point Amour*

Point Amour is the only historical site designated by the province in Labrador. Fewer people travel to Point Amour due to the poor gravel road conditions in comparison to Red Bay, which has a paved road to the historical site.

- *Regional airport in Port Hope Simpson*

A regional airport in Port Hope Simpson is a necessity. The current system is making it less feasible for airlines to operate and there are concerns that service could be diminished without this investment.

- *Road construction to Williams Harbour, Norman Bay and Black Tickle*

These communities must be connected to the main highway network in Labrador or have their local road networks upgraded. The current situation presents many challenges and safety risks that must be addressed.

- *Lift the pricing freeze on gasoline and home heating*

There is an unreasonable price difference for fuel on the coast of Labrador versus other areas of the province. People in parts of the district are paying 22 cents per litre more for gas than those just 76 km down the highway. All communities in the district support lifting the freeze except one. Government should look at pricing gas/home heating products equally, similar to alcohol, so everyone would have affordable access to these products.

- *Medical transportation assistance program*

This program should be extended to include transportation by private vehicle after certain distances. For example, those referred from Cartwright to Happy Valley-Goose Bay; Happy Valley-Goose Bay to St. Anthony; Coast of Labrador to St. Anthony and Corner Brook.

- *Invest in cellphone capital infrastructure*

Government should partner with the private sector to establish cellphone coverage throughout Labrador.

- *Water system for Mary's Harbour*

A new water system is needed to secure the future of the new crab plant.

"There are substantial issues throughout my district that need to be addressed," Ms. Jones said. "I am hopeful that Minister Kennedy listened to my presentation about the needs on the coast of Labrador and is willing to allocate funding for these initiatives in the coming budget."