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N.L. throne speech delivers attack

Williams uses reading to fuel ongoing feud with Harper
By GREG LOCKE Special

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ST. JOHN'S, N.L. — Premier Danny Williams used his government's throne speech Monday to deliver the latest attack in his ongoing feud with Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

"(We) are not heard at the federal cabinet table," Mr. Williams said in the speech, read by Lt.-Gov. John Crosbie at the opening of the Newfoundland and Labrador legislature.

Newfoundland and Labrador Lt.-Gov. John Crosbie reads the speech from the throne at the opening of the House of Assembly in St. John's on Monday. (RHONDA HAYWARD / SJS)

"Newfoundland and Labrador is treated with little but contempt and condescension. . . . No other province has been treated more dishonourably."

Responding to the speech, Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones reminded Mr. Williams that in his 2004 throne speech he said his government was going to "foster better relations with the federal government." She asked when that was going to happen.

"We need to set aside our difference with the federal government so we can move ahead with issues of shared jurisdiction," Ms. Jones said.

Mr. Williams said his overwhelming majority win in October's provincial election — the Tories won 44 of the 48 seats — was a clear mandate for his government and approval of its policies.

"It is this government's intention to ensure a long-term sustainable future for Newfoundland and Labrador. My election results show the people want us to stay the course."

Mr. Williams and Mr. Harper have been locked in a bitter feud for more than a year over the province's ability to retain its offshore oil revenues.

Monday's throne speech reprised a theme from previous ones, with a focus on what Mr. Williams calls self-reliance.

The speech had little in the way of concrete plans or policy, other than stating the province's intention to introduce whistleblower legislation and its planned investment of \$128 million for "critical repair to health-care infrastructure."

A secret three-year-old report on hospital maintainability that was inadvertently released recently by Health Minister Ross Wiseman said health-care facilities need \$170 million in repairs.

One observer said the throne speech was "more like Danny's greatest hits."

Ms. Jones pointed out the Tory government's shortfalls in several areas, including accountability, freedom of information and poverty.

"You have lots of revenue and lots of promises and it's time to do something for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador," she said.

Both Ms. Jones and NDP Leader Lorraine Michaels said that while Finance Minister Tom Marshall was holding budget consultations and talking about deficits with a debt clock as a prop, very little attention was being paid to the social deficit in the province.

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