

# NEWS

Last updated at 9:29 AM on 24/03/08

## Yvonne Jones says no shortage of issues

### Opposition in action

MICHELLE STEWART

Transcontinental Community Newspapers

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones is anxious to see what the provincial budget-expected in mid-April-will reveal and she is hoping a healthy surplus will mean great things for the province.

Jones said, though her opposition party is small, it has been effective saying they've been able to raise the profile of a number of issues in the province.

"We have been lobbying for a number of health issues to be dealt with in the province," she said. "There is a need to increase the number of nurses and social workers in the system and recruit them. There is a need to buy new diagnostic equipment such as digital mammography equipment, in concern with equipment for early diagnosis."

Jones said the new hospital tops the list of health issues in Labrador West and although she is convinced the project will go ahead, she is none too pleased with the delays.

"It will proceed only because the requirements are so important, it is very much an emergency situation to replace that facility," she said of the planned health facility. "But what upsets me is Government fell down on the job; they rushed to do this in an election to get votes and as a result of it they didn't do their homework."

She pointed out that Government neglected to examine the site knowing they were building this infrastructure in a mining town.

"They know mining towns require certain parameters to operate," Jones pointed out. "They could have left the Dept. of Health and went down to the Dept. of Natural Resources and realized that property belonged to IOC and the reason for that buffer.

We never should have ended up in the situation we are in with the hospital in Lab. West, a full year delayed and \$1 million gone in the ground, that's no good to anyone."

She is matter of fact in her summation of what created the problems of delays.

"It's simply because the government want to make an impression in an election," Jones stated. "They wanted to have ground being moved and activity going on so they could engage people in support and as a result it was a complete flop and the only people who are going to suffer are the residents of Lab. West."

Though she says the wasted money could have been used in countless other areas of Labrador West she still has no doubt the hospital will proceed simply because it has to.

### **Economic issues**

The opposition is pushing for more focus and attention to be put on the industries other than oil and gas in this province and she is hoping the new budget will reflect more on struggling industries.

"There is a lot of emphasis on the oil and gas industry but we are seeing a lot of our traditional resources going by the wayside, fisheries and forestry in particular," she explained. "These need to be profiled more and have more assessment. Tourism needs a boost to profile that industry as well as it will increase jobs for people in this province. We are trying to draw awareness and lobbying government for funding to be spent in those areas."

### **Low income and assistance**

People depending on social assistance are long due an increase, according to the Liberal leader, who says there hasn't been a significant increase in a very long time.

"Families who are living on assistance are living below the poverty line and children are often those who suffer the most," she commented. "We need to put increases in so they are able to live, at least, a measure above the poverty line, which they aren't today."

Programs to assist seniors of the province are also a lobbying effort on the Opposition's agenda. Jones identifies with seniors living way below the poverty line because programs such as homecare, for example, are draining them of their Old Age Security. This, she points out makes it very challenging for seniors to take care of their own health and maintain their homes.

"We are asking government to be cognizant of that and understand the pain and suffering people are going through and respond to it appropriately," she said. "That means putting in programs that allow seniors who need homecare services to be able to afford it so they don't have to spend every cent."

### ***Surplus days***

In a time when government should be in a great position to address the needs of the province's people, Jones says these are solid investments in the people and areas of the province.

There are many infrastructural needs and some of the greatest she says are in Labrador.

"I mean in Labrador West, that area is definitely in need of affordable housing for low income families," she added. "When you live in an environment that is very competitive and industrialized like Labrador West, those challenges become more and more difficult and government needs to realize this and address the problems around housing."

### ***Highways***

Jones doesn't expect any surprises when it comes to funding for the hard topping on the Trans Labrador Highway. The cost-sharing agreement she said has been committed by the federal government and she got that assurance directly from Regional Minister Loyola Hearn.

She expects the \$40 or \$50 million needed to complete the road from Cartwright to Happy Valley -Goose Bay will also be announced in the new budget.

The federal government has already paid its share of \$340 million and now, Jones says, its up to the province to put in the remaining \$40.

Though there has been no commitment to date, Jones says, she is hoping government will respond to pleas to have road constructed to Williams Harbour.

The community of about 70 people she said is greatly inconvenienced by not having a road to connect them to services not offered in the small community.

"It's a 20-kilometre piece of road that would connect this community to the highway at a cost of about \$6.5 million...it's not a lot of money in terms of the value it would be for the people. Giving access to those people to get around is priceless."

Jones said she is enjoying her work as Leader of the Opposition and says her attitude is positive.

She described herself as a very determined person who will continue to champion the issues of the people and make sure their needs get Government's attention.

"We have taken the approach, not of confrontation, but of getting things done," she said of her small team. "And I think that is what the people want, to get things done."

*mstewart@theaurora.ca*