

Liberals question effectiveness of Labrador Affairs office

By DAVE BARTLETT

THE TELEGRAM

The provincial Liberals questioned Wednesday in the House of Assembly whether money being spent in the Labrador Affairs minister's office could be better spent on Labrador.

Minister John Hickey rose in the House before question period to make a ministerial statement where he re-announced an extra \$200,000 for the winter trail grooming subsidy and \$275,000 for a trail groomer for Postville.

Both items were announced in last month's provincial budget.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones then stood and said the money has been announced at least three times.

"He has very little in his department to announce on any given day," said Jones. "I went through the estimates this morning and was astonished to find out that the Department of Labrador Affairs manages about two files."

Those files are the Labrador winter trail program and the air-foodlift subsidy, Jones said.

She said Hickey's budget of between \$800,000 and \$900,000 for the minister's salary and his support staff should be reinvested into Labrador.

She also said that the Department of Labrador Affairs spends less than \$2.5 million a year.

Before the last election the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs had one minister, but that position is now split between Hickey and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Patty Pottle.

Outside the House, Premier Danny Williams defended Hickey and his portfolio.

"Labrador Affairs is an extremely important department and it's important that Labradorians have a voice and you know a lot of our mineral development now is going on in Labrador," said Williams. "Labrador is an extremely important part of the future of this province so there has to be a Labrador Affairs ministry."