



Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones (right) spoke to the Conception Bay Area Chamber of Commerce Friday afternoon. — Photo by Keith Gorse/The Telegram

#### ECONOMY/POLITICS

# Commuter workforce unsustainable: Jones

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Opposition Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones says the province is depending on unsustainable revenue sources, including oil royalties and a commuter workforce for its economic growth.

She called for a plan for improving sustainable fishing, forestry, agriculture and fur industries Friday. Jones was the guest speaker at the Conception Bay Area Chamber of Commerce luncheon in Paradise.

"It is a scary thought and the trends that we have seen over the past number of years have shown that outmigration is robbing our communities of our people and most often it is the younger population that is leaving,"

she said.

"We pay for their education costs, yet other provinces reap the benefits of our skilled work force. Our population has already dropped by 61,000 people over the past 16 years."

The commuter workforce — 6,000 to 10,000 people working in other provinces who maintain families in Newfoundland — contribute up to \$1 billion in salaries every year, Jones said.

"[The money is] coming back home. It's being spent in our communities, and as a result of it we're bucking all the national trends when it comes to vehicle sales and purchases of new houses and construction," she said.

"One has to admit this is not sustainable development from many

social and cultural perspectives."

One consequence of people working away is an impending labour crunch in new industries in the province that require a large skilled workforce, including the Lower Churchill project, proposed Placentia Bay refinery and new mining projects in Labrador, Jones said.

"Government must not only have a strategy developed, but they must also take action to ensure we capitalize on these developments to bring people home," she said.

"Our commuter workforce must be willing to fill the void and in-migration needs to happen to ensure the province's large term future."

Immigrants must be encouraged to stay in the province through good economics and a welcoming social envi-

ronment, she said.

Although the province is showing a large surplus from oil and gas revenues, Jones said it needs to be planning for after the oil reserves run out.

"In the next 10 to 15 years, ISEBERM, Terra Nova and White Rose will either run out of oil production or be in the last years of its production. People need to realize that those surplus budgets and royalties we're getting from oil and gas today is going to be short lived within the next two decade," Jones said.

"If we don't invest in our renewable industries, in our fisheries, our forests, our technology, our human resources, then we will not have what it takes to fill the voids that will be left."