

FRONT PAGE

# A year of highs and lows: Jones

## Cameron Inquiry tops Liberal leader's list for 2008

BY DAVE BARTLETT

— Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram



*Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones gives a year-end interview to The Telegram in her office at Confederation Building. Jones says it's been a tumultuous year for the province.*

THE TELEGRAM

Yvonne

Jones is about to finish her first full year as leader of the provincial Liberal party and she says it's been anything, but an average year for the province.

"This was a year with a tremendous amount of highs and lows," said Jones in a year-end interview with The Telegram.

Like the price of oil, the province's economy — which was soaring for much of 2008 — began to slip by autumn she said.

Like the economic seesaw, the realm of politics also saw some ups and downs for Jones and the Liberals.

Jones said she was able to bring hundreds of issues to the attention of government over the course of the year.

On her list of things that prompted action from the Danny Conservatives are fire and safety inspections for hospitals, the need for more foster families and the shortage of several medical specialists.

Bringing up issues

But the breast cancer testing scandal, which led to the Cameron Inquiry, tops Jones' list.

"I'm certainly sure that the profile we gave that issue led to the inquiry ... and we asked for it on a number of occasions," she said.

The inquiry investigated why 386 breast cancer patients received false test results — affecting their treatment options — and how Eastern Health handled telling patients and the public about the mistakes.

On the other topics, Jones said the Liberals convinced government to review fire safety in more than 70 health-care facilities.

A review of the province's fostercare program led to a provincial recruiting drive to get more families to open their homes to children needing safe places to stay, she said.

And some doctors in the province, most notably pathologists and oncologists, were given substantial raises.

More attention needed

But Jones said not every issue raised by the official Opposition got the attention she would have liked from the province.

Improved mental-health services — especially for youth — better air ambulance services and changes to the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board (MMSB) remain issues for her.

"We're going to continue to raise those issues ... going into the new year," Jones said.

PROVINCIAL

# Jones optimistic, overall

*dbartlett@thetelegram.com*

*(From page No A1)*

Other high points for the province include the announcement that a hydromet nickel processing facility will be built in Long Harbour, Placentia Bay, by Vale Inco.

"The Voisey's Bay deal was done under an administration that I was a part of," said Jones proudly.

That project alone will bring thousands of new jobs to the area, she says.

Newfoundland and Labrador achieving "have" status was also a historic high point for Jones.

"We no longer depend upon on equalization from other provinces of Canada and the federal government, and I know that may be shortlived in light of the economic climate," she said. "It's still very historic and I think it's something that all of us as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should be proud of."

The Hebron offshore agreement was also a big deal, Jones said.

In August, the premier signed that agreement which includes a 4.9 per cent ownership share for the province.

"We want to have a long ... future in the oil business," said Jones.

"Whether the royalty regime and the investment regime that was ironed out by the Williams government will prove to be the most profitable deal that we could have gotten, I guess we'll see as goes on."

But Jones said she is encouraged that a deal was reached and hopes it keeps oil companies exploring for other reserves off the island and the North Coast of Labrador.

The results of the Oct. 14 federal election were also good news to Jones.

"A nice surprise for us was the fact that six Liberal MPs got elected in the province this year," she said.

Not all good news  
tection from its creditors.

An expansion of the Come By Chance refinery was also put on hold, all of which was bad news, Jones said.

"The lowest low of all was the (announced) closure of the AbitibiBowater mill in Grand FallsWindsor," she said. "If there ever was a low point in our history, when you start seeing industry closing like that, I don't think it gets much worse."

Jones said that closure alone will affect 1,400 families, the regional economy of central Newfoundland and the province as a whole.

The Liberal party took a financial hit itself when the House of Assembly management

— Photo by Keith  
Gosse/The Telegram



*Liberal Leader  
Yvonne Jones is still  
mulling over her  
future and hasn't  
decided if she will run  
for the party's  
leadership on a  
permanent basis. The  
Liberal leadership  
convention won't be  
held until the fall of  
2010, a year before  
the next provincial  
election.*

The Liberal party took a financial hit itself when the House of Assembly management commission voted down a recommendation in an independent consultant's report to give the party extra funding for research staff.

Jones said that was a major setback for the party, especially when the commission unanimously passed every other recommendation in the report, including more money for the government and NDP caucuses.

"We certainly will not dwell on it," Jones said. "We will work with the resources that we have to best represent the people of the province, and the Liberals as a party, also hit rough patches during the year said Jones.

"The health-care system, on many fronts, has been a low point for a lot of people in the province," she said. "There was hardly a day we didn't get calls that people were having surgeries cancelled or delayed simply because there weren't beds available ... or because of shortages of nurses."

Jones said parts of the health-care system remain in crisis and the No. 1 issue is the lack of mental-health services for young people, including the lack of a residential-care facility.

Jones also talked about how the slowing economy brought bad news of layoffs at Wabush Mines and temporary shutdowns at the Iron Ore Company of Canada and at Voisey's Bay.

Plans for a second oil refinery for the province have lost steam, as the company planning to build it couldn't find investors and have filed for protection in the province."

#### Lack of legislation

Jones was also disappointed the government failed to table whistleblower legislation, to protect government employees from losing their jobs if they come forward with problems within government.

"It would give the public more knowledge as to what's happening inside of government as well as other agencies of government," she said.

Jones was also hoping for an antiscab law, which would block companies from replacing unionized workers during a labour dispute.

Near the end of the year, the Liberals also started calling for a provincial stimulus package to help off-set job losses. And Jones said her party wants government to beef up programs for the fishing industry.

"We think that the fishing industry is going to be hard hit by what's happening right now in the economy," she said.

Jones worries some small fishprocessing companies could close if they can't find adequate financial backing.

#### A look ahead

But, overall, Jones said she remains optimistic about the year ahead.

She said she thinks the province can recover from the economic setbacks of the last few months of this year.

She hopes the province may see its first natural gas deal signed in 2009 and would like to see advancements towards the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project.

She also wants the province to look at a fixed link that will join the island and Labrador via the Strait of Belle Isle.

Jones also wants to see all the major road routes in Labrador finally paved.

Jones said the Liberals also want more improvements made in health care and the environment, including a restructured MMSB.

environment, including a restructured MMSB.

While Jones said she's enjoying the job as Liberal leader, both in the House and working with the party faithful around the province, she has yet to make a decision if she will run for the leadership of the party on a permanent basis.

But Jones has at least another year to think about that as the party won't hold a leadership convention until the fall of 2010.

Jones became interim leader in mid November 2007, shortly after Gerry Reid stepped down.

"I take my job very seriously and I want to do it well," she said. "Whether or not I'll want to do it beyond 2010 I guess that's something I'll have to decide."

Jones said the party is slowly rebuilding from the last election, which saw the PCs take 44 of the 48 seats in the House.

"We'll definitely be ready for (the election in) 2011. In fact we've made a tremendous amount of progress even in one year," she said.

"We have a lot more volunteers working with the party today than we did a year ago, that are actively engaged," said Jones.

"As an opposition, as good of a job we may do ... we know we are up against a government that has 44 seats in the House of Assembly, a premier that has a personal popularity in the high 70s, even 80 per cent."

Jones said facing that kind of a strength means the Liberals have to set realistic goals.

"We see our job as keeping government's feet to the fire, keeping them accountable to people and keeping them on top of the issues and that's what we'll continue to do," she said.

"Just because we raise a couple of issues and we have some success on them, that tomorrow we are going to oust the government out of office and take over, we have no illusion like that."