



UNIFOR
Newfoundland and Labrador
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Ms. Lana Payne,

First of all, I sincerely regret not responding by your preferred deadline of May 1. Although we were working on a response to the FFAW-Unifor questionnaire with a preferred target date of May 6, we must have inadvertently missed this other Unifor correspondence with a May 1 deadline. As you know, I participated in a forum for party leaders hosted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour on April 30, at which point I addressed many issues of concern to Unifor and your members. Clearly, these are issues I am eager to address. In fact, I believe many of my positions on these issues will be received as good news by your members, and I do expect to be held to account for these commitments if it turns out that the people of the province elect a Crosbie government. Below are my answers to your specific questions. Please place my answers before your members so they can see where I stand and prepare to hold me to account.

1. Do you, on behalf of your party, commit to reviewing the Labour Standards Act and regulations and to updating those laws to improve working conditions for all workers, including:

a. Amending the Labour Standards Act to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour; make it clear in the Regulation under the Act that overtime is paid at 1.5 times a person's regular hourly rate or 1.5 times the minimum wage, whichever is greater; provide for 2 paid sick days, where required, after 1 year of employment with an employer and decrease the number of years necessary to reach three weeks of paid vacation from 15 years to 7 years;

b. Providing restrictions on the ability of employers to schedule employee work hours, so that employees have access to more regularly scheduled shifts and less precarious employment;

c. Increasing the number of Labour Standards officers in order to proactively identify and rectify violations of the Labour Standards Act, as opposed to having a complaints driven system?

In the event that a Crosbie government is elected in Newfoundland and Labrador, the members represented by Unifor and others throughout our province will be pleased to have this honest commitment that a Crosbie government will work with representatives of labour, business and others as appropriate to review the legislation and policies governing the labour environment of Newfoundland and Labrador. I have personally been an advocate for individuals and groups of individuals who believed they had been harmed by the system, laws, policies and so forth. I have stood up for workers whose health has been compromised because of their working conditions, and it has deeply troubled me. Workers need to be protected, and fairly compensated when those protections fail. Although some would paint Progressive Conservatives as unfriendly to labour, I urge people to think carefully about the history of this province and recognize the advances that have come because of the reforms brought about by progressives within PC governments. I cannot speak for what has been done and said by others in the past, but I commit that a government I lead will be not just responsive but proactive in addressing the concerns of labour, collaborative, fair and open to partnering to nurture a healthy labour climate that is good for workers.

Regarding the minimum wage, I have made two direct commitments, along with others that have an indirect relation to the workers' incomes.

First, we will provide regular, reasonable increases to the minimum wage by linking it to the Consumer Price Index. This approach mirrors the current approach, which we have supported.

Some have questioned whether the base rate on which CPI is calculated is sufficient. The Poverty Reduction Strategy of previous PC administrations was lauded nationally for bringing poverty levels in Newfoundland and Labrador from the highest in the country to the lowest within a decade. We will begin the process of developing a new Poverty Reduction Strategy to build on what we started. The new Poverty Reduction Strategy will consider whether our approach to the minimum wage strikes the optimal balance. We must ensure we strike the optimal balance, because a minimum wage rate above a certain level could result in job losses, and this would not serve workers' interests.

There are other solutions that can extend the value of workers' minimum wage incomes and low-wage incomes. I believe it is time to stop paying lip-service to affordable child care and make a bold change in policy. The Crosbie affordable child care plan will make child care free to any family earning less than \$32,500 a year, and will subsidize child care on a sliding scale from \$0 to \$25 per child per day for any family earning less than \$65,000. Even families earning between \$65,000 and \$150,000 will have child care costs capped at \$25 per child per day, creating new jobs. This will remove a major expense for families living on low incomes, stretching the buying power of their income significantly. We will also move within 200 days to wipe out the levy and remove the tax on all forms of insurance. Such a move will inject \$170 million into the Newfoundland and Labrador economy, generating spending, hiring and growth. Our people have been taxed too much, and that has hurt workers. Our tax cuts will help the economy and help workers.

We will sit around a table with you and others to reform the Labour Standards Act, regulations and policies to address the issues you have raised. I will not predetermine the outcome of those discussions, but I want Newfoundland and Labrador to lead the country as a jurisdiction with an exceptionally healthy labour relations climate, labour peace and a partnership approach to issues that matter to workers and their unions. Whether the issue is overtime or paid sick time or paid vacations or scheduling, or proactive identification and rectification of Labour Standards Act violations, I do not have a predisposition to reject any of your suggestions out of hand. They sound reasonable to me. We will give employers and others a chance to respond, provide information and engage in discussions on resolving issues that need to be resolved, but if these revisions makes sense, let's act on them.

2. Do you, on behalf of your party, commit to amending the Labour Relations Act so that:

a. Where a company tenders work to a third party and the third party provides services at the company's location, if the company retenders such work then any bargaining rights relating to the contracted work is maintained, even if the third party provider changes, as if there had been a sale of business;

b. After 90 days of a strike or lockout, the Labour Board must appoint a special mediator with the power to compel the parties to meet and negotiate in good faith with the assistance of the mediator;

c. Either party may apply to the Board for an order requiring the resolution of the a strike or lockout by binding arbitration and providing the Board with specific authority to make such an order, where the Board is satisfied that:

i. Based on a review of the bargaining history the parties will not be able to conclude a collective agreement; or

ii. One of the parties has committed an egregious unfair labour practice relating to collective bargaining;

d. Where employers lockout employees as part of its collective bargaining strategy, such employers are precluded from using replacement workers.

Starting at your last question here, I was aware of the labour dispute at D-J Composites in Gander while I was engaged in the by-election campaign in Windsor Lake district last year. There was a NL Federation of Labour debate among candidates at the time, and this issue arose at the forum. I stated at the time that I believe the existing law, regulations and processes related to such labour disputes seemed quite robust, but I was concerned that the government of the day had wasted a great deal of time before properly applying it. It was not until the by-election campaign focused intense scrutiny on the issue that the government finally got directly involved. While they were applauded by some for intervening, no one was very happy that it took them so long to get around to it. Once they did get around to it, the tools at

their disposal proved to be effective. I know that Unifor and others are concerned that the rules right now are unfairly balanced and need rebalancing. We need to talk about this around a common table – government, labour, business and others – and resolve to strike a balance that works well for everyone and makes our labour climate healthier and more resistant to protracted labour disputes like this. Let's be proactive and not wait for another situation like this to emerge; and if such a dispute does emerge, let's agree to make addressing it an urgent priority. Newfoundland and Labrador is not well served when labour disputes drag on, and would be even better served if disputes did not arise in the first place.

I commit to reviewing the Labour Relations Act and any associated regulations and policies to ensure it is the best we can achieve to promote labour peace and a healthy working climate in Newfoundland and Labrador. We will look at the issue of bargaining rights when work is contracted. In principle, it seems wrong to throw up barriers to workers being organized and represented by unions in their working environment when clearly so many workers in our province have chosen to be represented by unions. I will not stand for union-breaking loopholes that violate the principles and objectives of the Labour Relations Act. I also believe those who deliberately undermine a healthy labour relations climate are doing the entire province a disservice and should be held to account for that. If current laws make it too easy to violate the spirit and intent of the Labour Relations Act, then let's work together to reform the law. I believe most employers are willing to work within the rules and should be respected for that. Those that flout or twist the rules need to be held to account.

I am a firm believer in mediation and arbitration. I have seen it work. We need to make it easier to get people around the table when there are disputes. But we must be equally vigilant to address matters proactively, so disputes do not arise in the first place. Workers and their unions will have my ear. Please hold me to account on this. I am sure you will.

3. Do you, on behalf of your party, commit to negotiating with the Federal Government in order to establish a well-resourced inter-governmental regulator for the offshore oil and gas industry, which deals solely with health and safety issues, as well as environmental protection matters?

I am a strong believer in the Atlantic Accord and the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board that the Accord established. It is intended to protect the health and safety of workers, and the integrity of our marine environment, and it has been instrumental in doing that. But during the SeaRose spill incident that you refer to, and also around the time of a near miss with an iceberg, we were deeply troubled to learn that proper protocols were not, or may not have been, followed. One option, as you recommended, is to establish a separate inter-governmental regulator for the offshore oil and gas industry to deal with health and safety issues and environmental protection. Another option is to take a hard look at the incidents and use them as an opportunity to reform the current processes. Whatever course of action we choose to take, it is imperative that workers' health and safety and the marine environment be protected against faulty and dangerous decision-making by operators. This province is well aware that terrible tragedies can occur when offshore safety measures fail. We ought to be the

leader in protecting workers and the environment. There is no reason whatsoever why we cannot have a strong and thriving offshore oil and gas industry where workers' health and safety is protected according to highest standards, and the marine environment is also properly protected from spills. We should ensure that every past incident is a learning experience so future incidents can be entirely avoided. Penalties must be severe. Protocols must be robust and effectively monitored. Prevention must be paramount, because some consequences cannot be undone. We need our offshore oil and gas industry. It is very important to our province. And we have proven that we can be effective as joint managers of the resource under the Atlantic Accord and the CNLOPB. Let us resolve to raise the bar, to set a target for zero health and safety infractions, to set a target for zero environmental damage, and to become the world leader in offshore oil and gas management, with a record that others can aspire to match.

Kindest regards,

Ches Crosbie
Leader, PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador

Sent from my iPhone