

Late Debate - Previous Tory Government Commitments

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

MS. VICKI CONRAD: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House today to speak to this resolution. I want to begin by saying how proud I am to be a member of this government because I know that when we make a commitment to Nova Scotians, we will make that commitment a reality.

I want to make mention to the member who brought up the very real concerns of the people in Yarmouth and across southwestern Nova Scotia who have experienced flooding conditions and the weakening of much of the infrastructure. I feel quite confident that this minister is taking those issues very seriously.

In my role as ministerial assistant for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, I have seen just how hard my colleagues - both in the department and in this Chamber - are working to make these commitments a reality. We said that we would undertake a five-year paving plan and we are doing just that. We said that we would improve road-building standards and we did.

Mr. Speaker, road building is a great example of how we are creating good jobs and growing the economy. Improving highway infrastructure is an investment in our local and provincial economies and in our communities. This year's highway budget is the second largest highway capital budget in our province's history. When we took office, we saw the deplorable shape of our roads first hand. This year our government announced that \$310 million would be invested in a variety of road and bridge projects for communities across this province. It follows last year's record-setting investment of \$325 million in Nova Scotia's roads and bridges.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is responsible for over 23,000 kilometres of roads in the province, the equivalent of driving from Sydney to Vancouver four times. This includes 100-Series Highways, secondary roads and bridges.

This has been a very busy year for both department staff and road builders across the province. Major projects are in various stages from planning to construction, including construction on Highway Nos. 101, 103, 104 and 125. The cost of building these roads is steep. In 2009 the cost was about \$3.5 million to build a single kilometre of new, two-lane 100-Series Highway.

I am proud to say that in Nova Scotia we have one of the highest percentages of paved roads in Canada. This means there are many suburban and rural roads to maintain. These are roads that received some rough treatment from our harsh winter weather so we spend the summer repairing as many areas as we can. This is all possible because of the hard work of Nova Scotia's dedicated highway workers.

We committed to create the secure jobs that Nova Scotia's economy needs and we are keeping this commitment. The road-building industry in Nova Scotia is a large source of jobs, creating an estimated 5,000 direct, and 2,500 indirect positions every year. A typical \$2 million highway repaving project creates 60 jobs, \$200,000 in business for the local trucking industry and \$400,000 in subcontracts to other Nova Scotia companies. Investing in highway capital improvements has been an important economic driver at a time when our province has needed it the most.

These projects are bringing a lasting benefit to Nova Scotians. They help ease traffic congestion. They make travel safer and support our economy. Together, with federal and municipal investments, almost \$230 million has been committed to infrastructure projects that will create secure jobs across Nova Scotia. We said we would maximize federal funds to build the infrastructure that communities need and we did it.

In fact, we have worked hard to maximize every dollar of federal stimulus funding this province has received. One example is the construction of Highway No. 103, Port Joli bypass. After well over 30 years, residents in southwestern Nova Scotia who live along Highway No. 103, in the communities of Port Joli to Sable River, will see the construction of the Port Joli bypass. This government is investing well over \$26 million and has partnered with the federal government under its Building Canada Fund for a total investment of well over \$53 million for Phase I of this piece of infrastructure.

Phase I, which will include surveying, detailed design work and land acquisition and environmental assessments is now underway. I'm proud to display on my office wall a detailed design of both Phase I and Phase II. Phase I construction is targeted to begin in 2011-12 and targeted to be completed in 2013. We will see 8.5 kilometres constructed from Broad River to Port Joli. This bypass will strengthen the Highway No. 103 infrastructure and improve safety along this stretch of highway, while at the same time supporting the local economy. It is projects like this that help attract and retain the skilled workers Nova Scotia needs while keeping our industries active.

This means we are also keeping our commitment to ensure that young people stay and build a life here in Nova Scotia. More than 100 projects are being delivered in communities across the province and we will continue to make the most of every federal dollar to strengthen Nova Scotia's economy. We are giving careful consideration to the needs, priorities and challenges facing this province. We are committed to working with communities and road builders in a transparent way and to sharing information about future road improvements.

Whether we are constructing a new road or building, we want to make sure we are doing all we can to be environmentally sustainable. Some of the initiatives underway include greening our fleet, installing weigh-in-motion scales for commercial trucks, and investigating greener technologies for road building.

Mr. Speaker, none of this work could be done without our dedicated staff. We have approximately 2,300 employees working in all parts of the province, many of whom are members of unions like CUPE and NSGEU. These are people who plow our roads in the middle

of the night, who make sure our roads are constructed with safety in mind and are built to last, and who oversee the construction of public buildings where people access important services across this province.

Mr. Speaker, as ministerial assistant to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, this is an area that I can speak to with the most knowledge. However, my government has done so much more for Nova Scotians in all areas of the province. Over the last several months we have made significant progress towards getting the province back to balance, creating good jobs, growing the economy, improving health care, and making life more affordable for families. We truly are meeting government's commitment to make life better for families in all regions of this province.

We have tabled a multi-year fiscal plan to restore the province's finances and keep services that Nova Scotians need and have introduced one of the most ambitious targets for renewable electricity generation in North America. Last Spring we introduced a budget that outlines the steps needed to get the province back to balance, improve the economy, and make life more affordable for many Nova Scotians, Mr. Speaker.

We maximized available federal infrastructure funds which are expected to create 7,000 person years of employment and generate \$300 million in income. Since June 2009, we have put the Legislature back to work for Nova Scotians and introduced new regulations for MLA expenses, better, open and accountable. We have frozen MLA and political staff salaries, eliminated the \$45,000 retirement allowance for MLAs, eliminated both the \$2,500 technology fund available to each MLA, and the \$1,050 monthly allowance. We reduced the daily per diem rate for MLAs while sitting in the Legislature to \$38 per day from \$84 and established the House of Assembly Management Commission.