

Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services
Pre-Budget Consultation to Finance Minister Tom Marshall

And the

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

February 21, 2011

By Vince MacKenzie, President

On behalf of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services please accept sincere appreciation for allowing me this opportunity to bring forward our Association's concern and recommendations regarding the upcoming budget.

Our message to the government of Newfoundland and Labrador is that the fire truck fleet in this province is ageing the cost sharing program to replace them is woefully underfunded. The problem continues to grow as the fire trucks in fire departments are aging faster than they can be replaced.

The services provided by the men and women of fire departments across our province is valuable to our communities, and I won't waste time stating the obvious especially after the recognition afforded our firefighters and other emergency workers after hurricane Igor.

The fire service is one service that funds as much as it can on its own, firefighters constantly fundraise for training and equipment, to provide services. No other municipal, provincial, or federal agency expects its participants to do so. As an example, when was the last time anyone saw a snow plow operator out raising funds for his equipment, or a police officer, or a paramedic, but firefighters in most municipalities are expected to by their respective local governments.

Last year, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of fire Services urged your government to increase cost sharing for fire trucks to 5 million dollars. This was simply to enable at least 20 fire pumper trucks to be replaced each year. There are approximately 150 fire trucks that need replacement today. Government answered with a modest increase of 800,000 dollars to meet the requested amount half way at 2.5 million dollars. Sadly, no extra fire pumpers were bought in this year as that funding was swallowed up by the replacement of a badly needed, outdated and obsolete, 33 year old Aerial Ladder truck. In the coming year, there will be two more badly needed aerial ladder replacements needed. This would see another 1.5 million of the funding swallowed up.

Firefighting equipment is expensive and so are the new technologies that come with it. As firefighters, we expect to stay up on technology, but with fundraised money this typically becomes a pipe dream as we typically tender to the cheapest way out to the lowest tender for basic equipment.

I wish to raise the following for consideration:

The provincial government expends approximately 4.8 million dollars directly on the fire services of the province.

That is 2.5 million in cost shared finding, 1 million in firefighting equipment assistance program, and approximately 1.3 million dollars in providing direct support to fire services in way of life insurance and

workers compensation premiums for volunteer firefighters, the Learn Not to Burn and fire prevention programs and grants.

Municipalities also spend millions

Municipalities spend millions on fire protection and when combined, just 7 or 8 of the provinces larger municipalities spend 5 times that amount on their Fire Services.

St John's -18.5 million, CBS -2.4 Million Corner Brook 3.2 million, Gander \$700,000, Grand Falls - Windsor 600,000, Marystown 220,000, Labrador City 550,000, Stephenville \$800,000.

Consider that only 7 of the provinces largest municipalities spend approximately 27 million of their own fire protection, and consider that there are another 250 smaller fire departments who allocate funding as well. Clearly, we are talking millions and millions spent, but only 2.5 million to assist with fire truck purchases from the provincial government. Consider that the province only spends 5 million on fire protection province wide makes one think as to why the fire service of this province is constantly struggling to maintain the status quo.

Fire services are left alone to embrace progress and newer technologies, Standing in line, communities have to wait their turn, and waiting for years of requests on file for funding, only getting attention when the fire trucks are considered obsolete and antique. The main problem being that in the full scheme things, the cost sharing funding levels are woefully inadequate. They are mere bread crumbs dished out to the problem that has now become, and will continue to grow, if adequate funding is not made available to at least halt this problem in the next 5 years.

This would be a little more tolerable if this was cosmetic equipment or recreation equipment, but we are speaking of critical infrastructure, the fire truck, this property saving, infrastructure saving equipment and sometimes life saving equipment.

Our citizens deserve protection that is modern and up to date. Especially those who provide their services free of charge one would think that their pleas would be heard to allow them to work safer and more efficiently. Recruitment and retention of firefighters is becoming a real issue in our communities, we need to support them with at least the adequate, modern, and up to date equipment to answer our emergencies.

Mr. Minister, I certainly sympathize with government's dilemma in allocating funding, but as the spokesperson for the 600 men and women of the province's fire services, we are placing this emergency call to you, to consider raising the cost shared funding to a minimum of five million dollars annually, and also in budget 2011-12 to make a special fund allotment of 1.5 million for the replacement of the two now obsolete aerial ladder trucks. We ask this special funding as well so that the cost sharing program suffers no more setbacks, and the fire service of this province can move in a positive direction in the next 4-5 years.

Thank you for your time, we trust you will consider this request

Vince MacKenzie

President, Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services