



NLFL President's Remarks – Unifor 2121 Rally – September 16th, 2020

Good Afternoon Everyone,

My name is Mary Shortall and I am the President of the Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL), representing over 70,000 workers who work in every single community in our Province, and in every sector of our economy.

As you have just heard - thousands of workers who depend on the offshore industry for their livelihood are desperately waiting to go back to work. Their lives have been in turmoil, and the uncertainty is wreaking havoc on them, their families, their communities and our economy. Protecting their jobs and incomes must be our priority. We ask the Federal government to do whatever is necessary to protect this priority.

I want to thank Dave Mercer and Unifor for organizing this rally today. I believe it's critical that we weigh in on this important discussion.

For decades, our offshore oil and gas sector has provided thousands of good jobs – jobs which support families and communities all over the province. We also recognize the thousands of indirect jobs that are created because of the oil industry in Newfoundland & Labrador (NL).

All these jobs add significant tax revenues to the public purse which, along with the royalties that government receives, helps grow local and provincial economies and provides important quality public services that we all need and deserve.

After all, these resources belong to all of us, and we should all share in the prosperity our resources create.

It is extremely frustrating these days, to hear about the economic devastation that will result if oil companies take leave of this province in the absence of government assistance.

This will be a broader topic of discussion I expect, but for now, until the Federal Government sees fit to announce a transition plan towards a green economy that protects jobs and supports communities, we expect action be taken to protect the jobs, the communities and the economy that exists now.

Workers who are directly and indirectly employed through the oil industry have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 recession, and drop in commodity prices.

It's been a tough year for everyone. Many workers have fallen through the cracks - many have lost their jobs. Many local businesses are struggling to survive. Some sadly, have not.



-2-

Our economy could not have weathered this storm, even to where we are today, if it were not for the assistance of the federal government who recognized their obligation, and have already extended significant emergency fiscal support to millions of people, businesses, provinces and municipalities.

Federal assistance has supported workers and helped maintain employment, and has supported businesses and other elements of the Canadian economy, helping to cushion the economic blow on families and communities throughout Canada.

We know only too well how devastating it will be for the well-being of all workers in NL, and to the economic recovery of the province, if the jobs related to the White Rose Project, and the oil and gas industry in general are jeopardised.

That message has been repeated over and over again – we are hearing it again today. There is no doubt – the result would be catastrophic.

Aside from the immediate loss of jobs and money from our province, investors will also quite rightly see our province's economic recovery as linked, at least in part, to the future of any oil activity – including the White Rose Project.

Failure to secure oil investments and jobs, and ensure a strong economic recovery in the province, will undermine federal fiscal and monetary policy efforts to date; reversing the achievements in strengthening business and investor confidence in the province's economic future.

It is far better for the federal government to work with the provincial government, oil companies, unions and affected communities **NOW**, to preserve good jobs and local economies, rather than waiting for a future crisis when they are forced to intervene.

I am here today on behalf of our Federation, to ask the federal government to do just that, and to support the call for government to continue its responsibility and to invest in the protection of jobs and incomes in this industry, which right now, are just too important to lose.

The federal government is in a much stronger, long-term fiscal position than any province in Canada. They must take the lead here and now - and ensure a broad-based economic recovery is able to take hold.

We reject however, any attempt by oil companies to use any financial support they receive from government to extract jobs, working conditions, or concessions from workers and unions.



-3-

Governments have an obligation to demand full disclosure from companies about their economics and financials, to insist on iron-clad guarantees regarding investment levels, jobs, wages and benefits, and respect for collective bargaining and collective agreements, in exchange for the large amounts of money that are being requested.

This precedent has already been set through the many programs the federal government has established already to support employers and industry in Canada, including its *Large Employer Emergency Financing Facility (LEEFF)* Program.

I want to be crystal clear.

Public money for oil and gas must come with strong, clear and stringent conditions that protects jobs, communities and, most especially, strong environmental and worker safety regulations.

We do not support a “blank-cheque” bailout for any corporation that results in bonuses for executives, dividends for shareholders or tax-avoidance through offshore tax havens.

We also expect our provincial government to support these conditions in their advocacy with the federal government.

As we have heard from government and the industry many times in the past several months – workers are indeed a critical piece of the success of the oil industry in NL.

These workers have been waiting already for far too long.

It is time the federal government, and Minister Seamus O’Regan, do the right thing. Show leadership and protect these workers, their families and communities now. Invest in our people and ensure that they can continue to do what they do best – make our economy work.

Mary Shortall
President, Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Labour

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