

Good morning to you, Mr. Commissioner, other participants.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to give this presentation. I am honoured *to be a part* of what I hope will become a turning point in the history of this province's oil and gas development. The Hebron project will be of tremendous benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the people of Canada.

Open public debate of this project can only lead to improvements on how the project is developed. The report of the Commissioner will be an important document which I am sure will get serious consideration from all participants and partners.

I am here today in my role as Labour critic for the New Democratic Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

My purpose here today is to ensure that the people who work on this project do so in the safest manner possible. Safety must always be the highest consideration in any decision in the offshore oil industry of this province. We *will never completely* eliminate risk, but we can work constantly, and vigilantly, to mitigate the ever-present dangers.

*Safety must be our first consideration.*

Let me start by offering my condolences to the families and friends of those who were lost in the tragic crash of Cougar Flight 491 on March 12, 2009. Like others from the NDP who have *addressed* this subject, I dedicate my work in this area to their memory.

Mr. Commissioner, this Review must do everything it can to ensure the future safety of offshore workers. I hope you will see the reason in my presentation, and promote the recommendations I make here today, in your report.

I hope we can, through our collective efforts here and elsewhere, ensure that men and women travel to and from the offshore to work knowing that everything possible is being done to ensure their safety.

I am concerned that this not currently the case in the industry. We must ensure this is the case going into the future, which includes the Hebron project.

Today I will bring to the Commissioner's attention a number of concerns about present and future safety issues. I hope these concerns will be taken into account as the Hebron project becomes the world class project we all hope it will be — in scale, in profitability, and especially in regards to the safety of the people who will do the work.

The North Atlantic is a dangerous place. Those who work in offshore industries regularly face risks that the vast majority of us can not imagine dealing with as part of our everyday work life.

The history of the exploration for and exploitation of oil off the coast of this province has been a history of tragedy and near-misses. I am sure all of us would be happiest if offshore tragedy were to become purely the stuff of history, and never again emerge as present-day reality.

What we are doing here today is important. Open public debate of this project can only lead to improvements on how the project is developed. The report of the Commissioner will be an important document which I am sure will get serious consideration from all participants and partners.

Mr. Commissioner, this Review must do everything it can to ensure the future safety of offshore workers. I hope you will see the reason in my presentation, and promote the recommendations I make here today, in your report.

It is inconceivable to me that cost should ever be a consideration in evaluating worker safety for any economic endeavour anywhere at anytime. If we cannot afford to do something as safely as possible, we should not be doing it at all.

There are a few thousand offshore workers serving the oil industry in this province. Their work provides billions in revenue for the people of this province, the people of Canada – and of course, the companies that exploit the resources. As Hebron comes on-stream, this number will increase.

So much wealth is generated by so relatively few workers. It offends me to think that cost would ever be a factor in determining how much we mitigate the risks these workers face.

Our offshore workers deserve the very best safety practices currently employed in the world. Government has stated as much many times.

And I agree with government. It is my belief that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador owe every worker our absolute, unwavering commitment to their personal safety.

For the purposes of this presentation I have selected four areas related to offshore safety on which I believe we need clear and immediate action.

Action in these areas will not only address existing serious safety issues in the offshore industry today, but will also ensure that the men and women who work on the upcoming Hebron project do so in the safest work environment we can provide for them.

The four issues I will address today are: the offshore work rotation, the need for an independent offshore safety authority, the problematic work culture in the industry, and the replacement of the S-92A helicopter.

### **Offshore work rotation schedule**

First, let me address the issue of changing the work rotation schedule.

It is time for us to reconsider the current offshore work rotation and change it from the current “3 weeks on and 3 weeks off” to a “two weeks on, four off” which has become the industry standard in Norway.

There has been a lot of talk during these hearings of ensuring the Hebron project is world class, and of adopting world class practices. New Democrats agree with this goal, and we want to ensure that this philosophy extends to labour practices.

Our local offshore industry is still a relatively young one, and so we must look to other jurisdictions to see how we can improve our industry in this province.

In jurisdictions like Norway there is an industry trend to move towards a work rotation with a longer rest period for offshore workers.

Studies indicate that much of the stress, mistakes, and personal difficulties experienced in the offshore work environment occur in the third week.

As I said earlier, the men and women who work offshore face challenges in their work lives that most of us cannot imagine. Their jobsites are remote locations in the North Atlantic, where they work in hostile conditions isolated from their family and friends for extended periods of time.

In recognition of this reality, European jurisdictions, which have more mature, better established offshore oil industries, have moved to a work rotation which includes more rest time.

Norwegian workers work 2 weeks on and 4 weeks off as the standard shift rotation. Norway has decided that this is the best rotation format to ensure a healthy work-life balance for people who work in such hostile conditions.

In the early days of that country's oil industry, Norwegian trade unions fought hard to win these rights, along with other favourable working conditions. We should not have to repeat this labour struggle here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the United Kingdom North Sea offshore oil sectors, where, I note, Exxon is a major operator, there is an increasing tendency for companies to change from 2 and 2 schedule to a 2 and 3 weeks off schedule. This is a reflection of the understanding that this work schedule provides for better work-life balance.

All parties participating in this review have made a public commitment to adopting best practices. Clearly, this improved work rotation schedule represents industry best practice.

Mr. Commissioner, New Democrats want to see government and the proponents work quickly with the union to adopt these rotations now, and entrench them into the future. This will ensure that the Hebron project is a truly world class project — as well run, efficient, and safe as Norway's.

My presentation today does not provide an appropriate amount of time for a lengthy discussion on how these measures should be implemented.

In the best of all possible worlds, offshore operators would move to this practice voluntarily, living up to their stated desire for projects to be world class projects which follow the industry's best practices.

Perhaps government, which has said, time and again in the House of Assembly that our offshore should be the best in the world, should produce labour legislation which would ensure that this more humane, favourable rotation benefits our offshore oil industry workers.

The benefits of this initiative are many: more people employed in the offshore, an increase in the tax base of the province, a better work/life balance for families with loved ones working in the industry, and indications that this work rotation would be an enticement to attracting more women to working in the offshore.

### **Independent safety authority**

My next issue is one my political Party has promoted for years — the creation of a truly independent offshore safety authority with jurisdiction over both worker safety and environmental safety.

Mr. Commissioner, on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009 — over two-and-a-half years ago, the oil industry in this province changed forever.

I do not have to remind anyone here of the details of that day's tragedy.

The subsequent inquiry into offshore helicopter safety produced a detailed report written by the commissioner, retired Judge Robert Wells.

At the end of his report, written after extensive public input, Wells issued 29 recommendations intended to improve the safety of all people who have to travel by helicopter to and from our offshore oil facilities.

One of his key recommendations was the creation of a truly independent offshore safety authority with a mandate and the tools to strongly enforce safety regulations without any actual or perceived interference.

In short, Wells recommended a strong independent authority with teeth, similar to Norway's Petroleum Safety Authority.

The fact we are all here participating in this review today shows the vibrancy and growth of our oil industry.

An independent safety authority is a natural result of our growing industry. Its implementation can only ensure that the Hebron project develops properly — safely.

We need this authority to be created as soon as it is humanly possible to do so.

Justice Wells issued his report just over a year ago. And, despite calls from many different groups, to date nothing has been done.

Last spring, we were told over and over by government in the House of Assembly, in response to our questions on the implementation of this recommendation, that they were engaged in discussions with the federal government, who share responsibility.

I wish I could provide a more accurate update, but government will not open the House of Assembly and thus I cannot ask them any questions on this issue in a venue where they would be obliged to provide an answer.

Mr. Commissioner, today we are discussing the Hebron project.

I would like to think that an independent safety authority that includes jurisdiction over environmental issues would be in place long before first oil from Hebron comes ashore.

But, a year after the Wells recommendations we see no movement by either the federal or provincial government to act.

As time passes by, I become more and more concerned about this.

### **Fostering a healthy work culture**

Mr. Commissioner the issue of healthy work culture in the offshore oil industry is also one my party has raised at times in the past.

We continue to receive anonymous emails from workers offshore on a host of issues which concern them.

These are people who work in the industry but are afraid to use formal channels to air safety and work-related concerns because they believe — whether that belief is founded or not — that they would face some form of punishment or retribution, or some form of negative consequences from their employers in response to their speaking up.

This is not a healthy workplace.

My party has heard many concerns raised regarding safety issues in all areas of the offshore, including helicopter safety. Many of these concerns were raised

anonymously, by people who said they do not trust in their employers, or in some cases, the regulator (the CNLOPB).

I understand it can be interpreted as unfair for a group such as the political caucus I represent to level allegations against oil companies, or helicopter companies, or even the regulator by referring to anonymous complainants as our source.

After all, any organization accused in public has the right to question and cross-examine its accuser.

Nevertheless, our office has received, and continues to receive, many anonymous concerns from people afraid that if their names are revealed they will face repercussions. Whatever the issues they are raising, this situation is unhealthy, and dangerous, and springs directly from the workers' reluctance to use the official channels supposedly available to them. It is a symptom of an unhealthy work culture.

As another example, the practice offshore has been for the employer to appoint the employee representative to company safety committees.

This is unacceptable.

Workers' representatives on issues as important as safety must be elected by workers themselves. After all, who better would represent their issues, concerns, and experiences?

I myself was not appointed by government to speak for people in the district of St. John's North.

People must have the right to decide, democratically, in a secret ballot process, who they would like to speak on their behalf.

It indicates to me that there needs to be a change. With the development of an entirely new project, like the Hebron project, we should ensure that the work culture is a productive, open, and transparent one from the start, with open dialogue among all participants.

There must be a complete overhaul of the offshore work culture, from an industry, labour, and government perspective, so that any worker anywhere can feel at anytime that he or she can speak openly, without fear of reprisal, about safety or other concerns.

In order for people to feel safe they need to feel they are a valued part of an industry-wide, ongoing, proactive safety culture. Referring back to my previous point, I suggest an independent offshore safety agency that listened to and respected worker input would be an excellent first step.

Developing a more open safety culture will be a difficult goal to achieve, but it is essential if safety is to become an on-going, proactive issue. Safety must be **everyone's** issue and everyone's responsibility.

### **Now on the issue of Replacing the S-92A helicopters**

Last week we saw the lone survivor of the Cougar Flight 491 crash speaking out on behalf of himself and the families of the men and women who died in that accident.

They are frustrated with the federal government's continuing refusal to respond to enquiries into the certification of the Sikorsky S-92A helicopter as airworthy to service the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore oil industry.

These citizens want to know how the helicopter was certified to fly when it **did not** meet the basic requirement that it be able to run for 30 minutes after losing oil pressure in its main gearbox.

The fact of the matter is this: While some helicopters were (and are today) truly “30 minute run dry capacity,” the Sikorsky S-92A was not, and is not.

The continuing use of this helicopter in our offshore industry is troubling. More than troubling, I would call it reckless.

And despite the best efforts by many who have workers’ best interests at heart to get to the bottom of this problem, the federal government maintains a deafening silence.

People – our people – still fly every day on the S-92A helicopter. The S-92A helicopter still does not meet the 30 minute run dry time requirement.

People working offshore deserve to have the risks associated with getting to and from their jobs kept as low as possible.

While it is true that a helicopter with a real 30 minute run dry capacity would not eliminate all of the risks, it would greatly reduce risk and make helicopter travel much more safe.

There are better helicopters which would be better suited for the job here in our offshore.

Knowing that, I hope all parties will agree that the S-92A should be immediately replaced.

## **Conclusion**

That concludes my remarks here today.

Mr. Commissioner, thank you for your time and I look forward to any questions regarding what I have said here today.