

SPEAKER'S NOTES

January 29, 2015



In the Spring of last year, I seriously considered entering the political arena as a contender for the PC Party leadership.

That consideration led me to take some private, focused time to deeply explore the then current status of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I spent this time reviewing and analyzing the financial condition of the Province, its make-up and structure and the overall challenges our wonderful Province was facing. Not unlike I would in buying a new business, I conducted my "due diligence" to determine if I wanted to step in and offer myself as the potential CEO of the Province better known as Premier.

My decision, as was announced last year, was to not enter the PC Party leadership challenge. However, rather than just stepping away and doing nothing, I sensed a real void in the role of a non-partisan commentary that, in my humble opinion, needed to be filled ... and I truly wanted to do something for the Province.

My decision was to stand in the middle ground - with no political affiliation - to be, as I have called it: politically androgynous. To create an entity that could offer to any political party and to the people of this great Province facts, insights, options and considerations for positive change ... without criticizing current, previous or future governments. Just the facts, no color commentary.

In effect, to focus exclusively on positive opportunities from this moment forward ... regardless of our condition.

I originally felt that a Think Tank would be the way to go. However, as I continued to explore our Province's financial circumstances, I realized that most of the metrics were already in existence - just buried in paper. Reports from the Auditor General, Conference Board of Canada, AIMS, amongst others, provide statistics, population numbers and trends. The Government itself in its Budgets, financial reports, and Economic Reviews help color the reality of our circumstances. The Economics Branch of NL and Statistics Canada combine to enable a thorough review of "the numbers" including fiscal and social. A Think Tank would certainly expand our detailed awareness of this but as a Soul of Action; I wanted to see positive changes earlier than later.

So, I am proud today to launch the politically androgynous 'THINK NL'

Over the course of the past 6 months ThinkNL has evolved.

Today, I am unveiling it as a vehicle through which positive options can be driven.

Let me very clearly state what ThinkNL is NOT, before I expand on what it is and will be.

- ThinkNL is NOT another source of criticism of government - past, present or future editions. There are plenty of critics and each serves a purpose.
- ThinkNL will NOT attempt to enter the world of political opinion as there are already some very interesting perspectives currently in our world through blogs, media and the digital universe.



- ThinkNL is NOT a Think Tank. It is NOT a lobby for any specific interest group.

So, in simple terms What is ThinkNL:

ThinkNL is a verb. It is a call to action. It is a call to think to the power (nl) of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is a call to our youth ... whose future it is we are holding in our hands. It is a call to Think and Rethink ... before you vote.

We need to know where we are, accept our current reality for what it is and then to call upon our collective intellect, energy and love of this Province to move it ahead in a positive direction ... not only for ourselves, our children, our parents and grandparents but also for the future generations to come. It may even be time to start paying it 'backwards'!

We cannot get there if we continually focus on the past and what has been and is wrong. We need to understand the problems but focus more on the solutions. We need to learn from both our mistakes and our successes and build on them both. We need to fully comprehend where we are and from there, chart a course forward.

At its essenceThinkNL challenges socio-political issues with bold, factual and unbiased options to inspire positive change in Newfoundland and Labrador.

And how is it that I, as a single soul, am intending to do just that. Well, I AM NOT!

My intention ... my invitation ... is to expand this whole challenge to the collective WE.

Yes, each and every person. Each and every political party and member thereof. Each organization ... representing all 526,977 of us (down from 580,100 in 1992)!!

ThinkNL will offer a simple web site to summarize and present some of the metrics so that each of us can clearly understand them. It will do a detailed review and analysis of complex projections and put forward simple metrics to enable an easy appreciation of where we are.

We will assemble experts in the major areas of concern ... social and fiscal ... and challenge them to co-create options that could lead to positive change without the negative commentary on how or why we got to a particular point. Understanding the present is essential, but our focus will be on crafting options going forward ... positively. As these arise ... not after months and months of study ... but as they arise we shall release these on our web site, twitter and other digital options as they evolve. You, each and every soul of this Province, are encouraged to follow us and read our website. It will simply put forward ideas for conversation, analysis and to get us thinking. Thinking towards solutions and options to move our Province forward. Positively.



ThinkNL logo was influenced and designed by our creative under 30's. The web site ... just launched ... will evolve into areas of concern we have identified and will build and change as these areas of concern change. Expect to see Financial, Health and Education as early topics of focus. You will be able to post ideas, suggestions and topics for our review. We will regularly post "Did you know?" topics starting with some of the key metrics that define us today and looking into the future. They will be meant to stimulate conversation, debate and idea generation in your own communities.

So ... here we are the end of January 2015. A time of political expectancy. Federal and Provincial elections looming near.

ThinkNL starts by stating our current reality. The metrics I will mention today, and post over the coming weeks and months, are simply put facts. We are providing no commentary on whether we think or feel they are good or bad. They simply are what they are.

Let's tease out a couple of ThinkNL base metrics for you to think about. Look at these as the foundation upon which we must build.

Let me start with some basic snapshots of where we are as a population of culturally blessed souls.

1.45 ... this is a magic number. This is our fertility rate ... birth rate. It is the number upon which a large part of our future hinges. What does it mean? Well, assuming static migration, we are declining in population as 1.45 children per woman will not replace our population. At the same time this is occurring, we have witnessed more deaths than births over the past 2-3 years ... a trend that is forecast to continue.

2020/3030 ... another magical number! In the year 2020, 30% of our population will be 30 ... and declining, AND 30% will be 60 and growing!!! We are the 5th oldest population in all 63 Provinces/States with the second lowest ... and declining ... growth metrics. We are, as we all know, an aging population.

45% ... we are pushing the elasticity of our financial health. The recent 'reality check' with oil and commodity prices has shocked us all. Period. We now have pressure to reclaim control over our present and our future and to do so we have to reclaim wise, logically driven, socially balanced financial management. And trust me, effecting this may hurt us all a little. But as we all have heard so often ... short term pain is sometimes essential for long term gain. Politically ... for any leader, this is hard medicine to administer!!

While we can all justify why and where we are, know that, according to our Auditor General, we are spending 45% more to run our Government than the average in Canada. Fact. We have in our Government employ, as reported recently by the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, what appears to be some 13,000 employees costing some \$880M more than the National average per capita. Fact.



Our current budget projected a \$538M deficit when oil was \$105 a barrel before its price went into freefall. This is now expected to exceed \$1.0B ... and next year's projections significantly higher unless significant spending reductions are actioned.

This is where we are!!! Our reality!! Regardless of political persuasion ... These numbers form the base from which social programs must be structured and financed. We cannot simply proceed without each of us ... not only Government ... knowing these numbers. It is our challenge.

The time has come to step back from criticism, cynicism and complain-ism. We are at this very moment in Newfoundland and Labrador seriously challenged from myriad perspectives threatening our social, economic and cultural fabric.

It is time to put aside the polarity of politics and seek solutions rather than engaged debate on the problems and who really caused them.

Today, ThinkNL initiates its proactive, positive, no blame approach. I invite you to join me.