



Mr. Jerry Earle
President, NAPE
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Dear Mr. Earle,

Thank you for inviting me to respond to the election questionnaire you sent along on behalf of your 30,000-plus members. Many NAPE members have been telling me they are tired of being ignored by a decade-old Liberal government that is out of touch with their needs and more interested in helping their friends than caring for others.

It's time for a new government that works for all of us. That is what I am bringing to the table. I bring a balanced, progressive approach that I believe aligns with the goals and vision of NAPE and its members. We are not so different, and you will find me easy to work with. I am offering you the opportunity to partner with me to bring about the real change our province desperately needs right now – the positive change that NAPE members say is long overdue. Together, we can do this.

Let me address your questions one by one.

The Economy & Cost of Living - Question: If elected, how will your party grow the economy in a way that makes life more affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? How will you balance economic development with the protection of public services, and what specific actions will you take to reduce the cost of living for working families?

The cost-of-living crisis gripping the people of our province was avoidable, but largely ignored for a decade by the Liberals, whose tax hikes helped cause it. Four more years of this is the last thing Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need. We need change.

A PC government I lead will prioritize affordability by lowering taxes for all of us. This will help those most in need and drive economic growth in ways that create jobs and revenues for strong public services. Strong economic development will protect and sustain strong public services by broadening the revenue base needed to support such services.

To reduce the cost of living for families, we will take concrete actions, including reducing income tax by raising the basic personal exemption amount to \$15,000. This means that no one in our province will pay provincial income tax on the first \$15,000 they earn.



We will also take action on taxes and fees by wiping the sugar tax off the books entirely and permanently lowering the gas tax; reviewing all taxes and fees to remove any deemed unnecessary; expanding the physical activity tax credit to make healthier living more affordable; and raising and indexing the seniors' benefit while reducing the tax paid by seniors who choose to work after retiring.

But our plan doesn't stop there. We are putting a focused effort on supporting young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who can help grow this province. That is why we are proposing a tuition refund program for graduates who stay, work and live in our province. We will also expand paid work terms for students, many of which are future NAPE members, and offer job guarantees for students who study in hard-to-fill healthcare programs.

Our plan also focuses on providing help to the most vulnerable in our communities. We will expand the NL Child Benefit so 3,000 more children can receive the benefit and launch a comprehensive poverty reduction and prevention strategy to give our province once again the lowest poverty rate in Canada.

This is just a brief summary, with more details in our policy platform. Together, our plan is designed to lower taxes for all of us in a way that will drive growth that increases jobs and protects public services.

Climate Change & Protection for First Responders - Question: What are your party's priorities when it comes to addressing the climate crisis? If elected, will you commit to ensuring first responders, particularly wildland firefighters, have the protections they need — including presumptive cancer coverage — as adverse weather events become more common?

It is obvious from the recent wildfire crisis that something fundamental is changing, and it is impacting us greatly. We must adapt rapidly and take measures to protect people. This is one of the reasons I support green energy like hydro and advancing the green economy. Adverse weather events and natural disasters are becoming more frequent. We must prepare for these events and protect our first responders who keep us safe.

The Liberal government has not moved swiftly enough to protect wildland firefighters, many of whom are actually volunteers. They lack appropriate gear, and one of the province's waterbombers was mothballed when it was most needed. We have been calling for urgent action for years, and will use our opportunity in government to ensure all of us are well prepared for the next fire season, through greater support for firefighters, better gear, fire breaks where appropriate and other measures that the experts say are needed.

That is why I was pleased to have committed that under a PC government every volunteer fire department will receive wildland coveralls. I was also pleased to have committed that a PC government would hire 50 more wildland firefighters each year - and we will hire them 4 weeks earlier so they can be trained and on the job ready for when the fire season starts.

You are also right to bring up presumptive cancer coverage. Our Party has long been a leader in fighting for presumptive coverage of first responders, and we will continue to lead, ensuring those who put their lives at risk are better protected from harm and properly compensated when their work impacts their health.

We also have to deal with the threats of worsening storms, inadequate breakwaters, flooding, permafrost melting, and storm-damaged infrastructure, and make sure adequate and timely support is available to families in need. Provincial leadership and sound mitigation measures can also help homeowners continue to qualify for affordable insurance. Change is here, and we need to be leaders in adapting and protecting people.

Healthcare & Public Services - Question: If elected, how will your party support healthcare workers and reinvest in the public healthcare system? Will you commit to strengthening public delivery, including considering bringing homecare into the public system? And how will you address chronic understaffing and the working conditions faced daily by our healthcare workers?

A PC government I lead will strive to make sure every resident of our province has access to healthcare when they need it. I believe strongly in public healthcare delivery, and will safeguard it. At the same time, I will support our doctors in their clinics and make sure no one has to pay to see a nurse practitioner.

I will implement the recommendation of the Registered Nurses' Union to bring local nurses to rural and remote communities, ending the reliance on out-of-province travel nurses. At the same time I will fully cover the costs of traveling for essential care when a patient must travel for healthcare services.

Access to care is paramount, so this will also require a more accessible air ambulance service. To address chronic understaffing, I will give healthcare students, studying in a program where there are current shortages, a job offer at the start of their studies so they can plan for stability and add seats to our nursing and nurse practitioner programs. I will also expand our medical school.

I believe all healthcare workers must be able to practice to their full scope, and emergency services should be available to people 24 hours a day. I will expand access to diagnostic equipment with 4 new MRIs in rural Newfoundland and Labrador so people are treated sooner, avoiding the suffering and costs of delayed intervention.

In collaboration with frontline workers and the organizations that represent them, I will create a robust health human resources plan. This plan will outline the mix of healthcare workers needed, where they are needed and when they are needed. I sincerely hope that NAPE will agree to be a part of writing this plan.

I also believe everyone in the province should have timely access to mental health and addiction services, and will achieve this through expanded mobile crisis teams, new hires in a range of professions, and easier access to care facilities such as treatment centres. The failure to make addictions treatment a priority has fueled a wave of crime in our communities and brought new risks to people. We must make access to treatment an urgent priority.

At the same time, I have heard the concerns of frontline workers, many of whom are NAPE members, about risks to their safety, and I will make risk reduction measures a top priority, so people are safe. On the other issues you raise, I look forward to listening to you and collaborating on solutions. We must work together to improve our healthcare system so people receive timely care they can rely on. We also need to help people afford to live healthier lives. All of these things will be part of my approach, and nothing will be a higher priority than moving quickly to provide the kind of healthcare system Newfoundlanders and Labradorians needs.

Privatization of Our Public Services - Question: If your party forms the next government, will you commit to protecting the following public services from privatization:

- Long-term care
- Acute care services (dietary, maintenance, housekeeping, security) currently delivered publicly.
- Highway snow clearing and maintenance currently delivered publicly.
- Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation (NLC)
- Motor vehicle registration services
- Registry services (deeds, companies, and securities)
- Provincial ferry services

Please provide your position and any additional details regarding your party's approach to privatization.

Let me be clear on two points. First I believe essential public services ought to be delivered by the public sector. Second, I also believe in respecting the right of workers in both the public and private sectors to organize and seek effective representation from labour unions. This right is enshrined in Canada's Constitution under the 'freedom of association' provisions of the Charter. NAPE effectively represents both public and private sector workers in our province. So even if a service is being delivered by a private employer rather than the government – which is the case in some areas of service – workers delivering that service have the right to be protected. For example, some long-term care in our province is already delivered by private employers, but these and other employers are held to high standards and have an obligation to respect their workers and treat them fairly. If they fail, then workers, their unions, the government and the public need to step in.

Unlike the Liberals, I am not driven by a privatization agenda. I have not seen a persuasive argument that privatization of services will deliver those services better or reduce their costs. As Premier, my ministers and I will be looking closely at all the services you mention, and how best to deliver them – but we will be doing this in collaboration with you, because people on the frontlines are the subject matter experts.



My focus is on delivering the highest-quality services that Newfoundlander and Labradorians need, at reasonable costs, without waste or poor management. To achieve these goals, all of us must work together. That means I want you to join us around the table to talk about how best we can improve the way we do things, so everyone is better off. Collaboration and teamwork will define my administration. You need not fear any radical, top-down approaches on my watch. I look to NAPE as a partner in this and look forward to working with you throughout our term.

Workplace Violence - Question: What concrete steps will your party take to address workplace violence in Newfoundland and Labrador, and how will you ensure that workers are safe, protected, and respected on the job?

Workplace violence is never acceptable.

The government must take a lead role in preventing violence and crime, punishing offenders, and addressing the needs of those who have suffered. An important first step is to listen to people with lived experience with violence, to identify risks and solutions. But talk is cheap unless it leads to meaningful action and feedback mechanisms to identify what works and what needs fixing. People have been talking about violence prevention for decades, yet the problem persists, so we know something is not working.

Public services are, by their nature, public facing, leaving workers particularly vulnerable. We must educate the public about violence and respect while also providing physical and operational barriers to keep workers safe while they do their jobs. Violence has been reported by receptionists, teachers, nurses, social workers and many others. Police officers and correctional officers are trained and equipped to deal with violence, but others are especially vulnerable, even away from the workplace. Just as we need to get crime under control, we also need to address the root causes of all forms of violence and take assertive action to protect employees. Workers must know where to turn when they feel threatened or violated. Workers need to know they have a place to go and will be believed if they experience violence. They need to feel safe at all times in the workplace. I intend to direct my ministers to open up these conversations with public employees and their unions on a priority basis, and channel this feedback into real solutions built on collaboration and mutual respect.

Back-to-Work Legislation - Question: Will your party give unionized workers in Newfoundland & Labrador its commitment to refrain from using back-to-work legislation to end legal strikes in our province?

The right to good-faith collective bargaining is enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of Canada's Constitution, and it is imperative that we honour that right. I believe in working out agreements at the bargaining table. Unionized public service workers in our province deliver essential services, which is why our public service unions and the government have collaborated on special provisions to ensure essential services are not compromised when job action occurs.

FOR ALL OF US



I would prefer to prevent job action by taking good-faith negotiating seriously. I believe we can avoid strikes altogether and reach negotiated agreements by working together respectfully, professionally and proactively to advance the goals we share for the greater benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I believe we will soon discover that we want precisely the same things, and will be able to work well together for everyone's benefit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Tony Wakeham'.

TONY WAKEHAM

Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador