



Noteworthy

PROVINCE'S credit rating upgraded

Standard and Poor's has upgraded Newfoundland and Labrador's long-term issuer credit rating to A minus from triple B plus. This is the first time since the collapse of the groundfishery, and the credit downgradings which resulted, that the province has held an A rating from any agency.

This upgrade is good news for Newfoundland and Labrador. It enhances the ability of the province, and its Crown corporations, to access the financial markets on more favourable terms and at lower interest rates.

The upgrade from Standard and Poor's, one of the most influential credit rating agencies in North America, reflects confidence in the economic growth of Newfoundland and Labrador. In issuing the upgrade, the agency

cited strong GDP growth in the past two years, which is expected to continue into the medium term, as an important rating consideration. They also said that the province's "firm fiscal restraint has resulted in the stabilization of the provincial debt burden, even including the direct debt incurred to make special pension contributions."

Standard and Poor's also noted that offshore oil production is a major contributor to GDP growth, that employment gains are broadly based and that consumer confidence has been bolstered. Their analysis took into account the impact of delays in the development of Voisey's Bay, as well as the recent tax reductions announced by government. ¶

OFFSHORE LAND SALE hits record high

For the second year in a row the Canada-Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board is reporting a new record for land sales as a result of the 1999 Call for Bids in the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore area.

This year \$192.5 million in bids were received, up from \$175 million in work expenditure

commitments last year.

"The offshore activity in this province is strengthening and gaining, local, national and international attention. This announcement confirms the growing confidence in Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore," said Mines and Energy Minister Roger Grimes. ¶

FAST FACTS about TAX CUTS

- ▶ The three-year tax reduction announced by the provincial government on November 16 will put at minimum \$175 million back into the hands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.
- ▶ Starting on January 1, 2000, taxpayers will pay at least five per cent less Newfoundland tax than they did in 1999 on the same income. By the end of year three, they will pay at least 15 per cent less.
- ▶ Because of sound fiscal management, government is able to pass on the dividends of the growing economy while at the same time maintaining our social programs, such as health care and education.
- ▶ A single taxpayer earning \$40,000 a year will enjoy actual savings of \$217 in the first year, including tax reductions and any surtaxes which may apply. In the second year, net savings will be \$418 and in the third year, net savings will increase to \$668. ¶

More Money for autism

Health and Community Services Minister Joan Marie Aylward has committed more than \$2.2 million, over the next three years, for autistic children in Newfoundland and Labrador. The funding will be used to expand an early intervention pilot project for 20 children ages 18-42 months with Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD).

Funding will also be provided to train professionals in pre-school and school treatment options; to create positions for three child management specialists; to provide training and transition planning for school entry and exit; and, to provide an annual grant of \$40,000 to the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador to help them establish a provincial office. ¶

