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Provincial Budget Day



Kathy Dunderdale's first budget as elected premier will be brought down today, and it's expected to be an austerity document. Despite a number of good-news announcements in the past week or so, today's budget is expected to outline reined-in spending to deal with a 1-billion dollar drop in revenue this year. Atlantic Accord payments are no more, and oil revenue will drop due to refit work that will take two offshore wells out of production this summer.

Earlier this year, Premier Dunderdale indicated that she was looking at a 3 percent cut in spending across the board and was hoping to achieve that not by cutting jobs, but through attrition and other means. Government is undertaking a spending review of every department and program to identify areas that can be cut. In the meantime, plenty of groups are looking for increased spending, not the least of which is Municipalities NL, which is seeking a new fiscal arrangement with government. VOCM's Brian Madore, Linda Swain and Kenny Sharpe are in the budget lockup and will have all the details as the budget is read in the House of Assembly beginning at 2 p.m.

The NL Employers' Council will be watching today's budget with the hopes that it will involve more prudent and efficient spending within government

and government departments. Executive Director Richard Aleander says they have publicly urged government to develop a more aggressive plan for debt reduction. He hopes the budget will address what he sees as the massive taxpayer burden of unfunded pension liabilities and post retirement benefits, which he says account for 66 per cent of the province's nearly 8 billion dollars in debt.