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## Will we have the luck of the Irish?

By AARON BESWICK, Special to The Telegram

The government unveiled an innovation strategy at the Johnson Geo Centre in St. John's Monday that Premier Danny Williams said will help "turn Newfoundland into the Ireland of Canada."

Innovation Newfoundland and Labrador: A Blueprint For Prosperity, pledged \$20 million over the next four years to support innovative products and ideas in the province.

Of that amount, about \$3 million a year will go to a commercialization fund to help small- and medium-sized businesses bring their innovative products to the market.

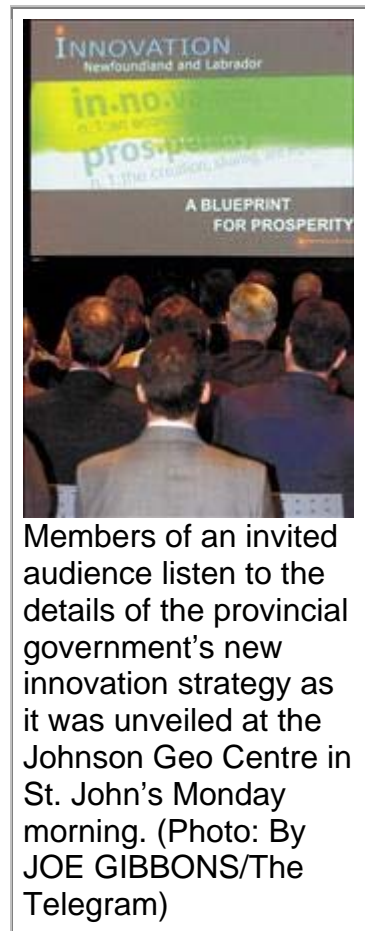
Another \$2 million per year will go to the Innovation Enhancement Program for public-sector institutions, not-for-profit groups, community organizations and industry groups that enhance the province's innovative capacity.

The innovation strategy was derived based on 12 round-table discussions held across the province, 50 interviews with key stakeholders and 23 independent proposals.

Education Minister Joan Burke said the strategy will work in tandem with the money for post-secondary education pledged in the government's 2004 white paper on public post-secondary education.

The white paper included allocations of \$22.5 million to expand the Industrial Research and Innovation Fund, and \$34 million for apprenticeships, science/technology programming, training and infrastructure.

The premier, who arrived at the Geo Centre wearing a sealskin jacket, said the province has a long history of innovation.



Members of an invited audience listen to the details of the provincial government's new innovation strategy as it was unveiled at the Johnson Geo Centre in St. John's Monday morning. (Photo: By JOE GIBBONS/The Telegram)

“At one time, cod was the foundation of our economy, then it disappeared overnight. So we fished crab, then expanded into aquaculture. ... We’ve been innovating and adapting for a long time, but innovation has become too important to be left up to chance,” said Williams.

The premier said money in the commercialization fund would go to companies that have finished research and development work, but need extra capital to market their products. He used Blue Line Innovations Inc. as an example of the type of innovation the government wants to support.

In 2004, Blue Line received \$366,900 from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency to test and market their PowerCost meter, which allows homeowners to monitor how much power they’re using and what they’re paying for it, in real time.

Recently Blue Line landed a \$4.5-million contract with Hydro One in Ontario to provide 30,000 residential meters.

Williams said the government decided to put money into innovation because it’s important to encourage the province’s economic momentum while opportunities exist.

“You’ve got to have meat on the bones in order to go forward,” said Williams, referring to the province’s sound fiscal footing.

“And right now, we have the opportunity to go forward.”

Judy Foote, the opposition critic for Industry, Trade and Rural Development, wasn’t impressed.

“It’s bothersome to have a plan which neglects to mention traditional industries,” said Foote.

“This strategy casts aside the fishery and neglects rural communities, as if they have no part in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.”

She called the innovation strategy a repackaged attempt to diversify the economy.

“This government came into power claiming that they already had an innovation plan, and now, two years later, they come up with one that has no new ideas in it.”

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