



PEI FEDERATION OF LABOUR'S 2007 SUBMISSION TO THE PROVINCIAL BUDGET

Submitted Wednesday, January 31 , 2007

Introduction

Provincial Treasurer Mitch Murphy, in response to your call for public input into the 2007-2008 provincial budget, the PEI Federation of Labour would like to submit the following items for you to consider when you are writing up this year's budget

Pension Legislation

The Federal Government and every province, except for one, has pension benefits legislation in place which is legislation that regulates workplace pension plans. The one exception to the rule is Prince Edward Island. The P.E.I. Legislature adopted the Pensions Benefit Act in April of 1990, but the legislation was never proclaimed, therefore, it was never put into force.

When we discuss this issue with your government, the main stumbling block that keeps coming up is funding to set up the necessary government structures to implement and administer this legislation.

Considering every other jurisdiction in Canada has managed to put Pension Legislation into effect, the PEI Federation of Labour considers it to be long overdue for your government to find the necessary funding to provide Island workers with this basic protection that has been afforded every other worker in Canada.

PEI's workers have worked hard to setup pension plans and make sure that the contributions they make to those plans will help ensure they can afford the retirement they deserve after all their years of effort and service to society. After 17 years of waiting they need to know that there is legislation in place to make sure that the retirement they have worked so hard to earn will be there for them when they retire.

Therefore we urge you to put aside enough funding in this budget to finally enact this very important piece of legislation.

Public Healthcare

The PEI Federation of Labour would like to express its extreme concern over comments made in the press by your colleague Health Minister, Chester Gillan during the Canadian Medical Association's meetings in Charlottetown that he is willing to look at private options for healthcare on PEI.

How ironic, it is that approximately one week later by a 43-30 vote, the California State Assembly approved a bill inspired by Canada's national medicare system, that would eliminate private medical insurance plans and establish an universal health-care plan that would provide free medical, dental, vision and prescription drug coverage for all

California residents by 2009 through a state-run agency. Although the bill was later vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger for ideological reasons, the problems in California's Health Care System that caused the Assembly to approve that bill still exist. The problems are:

- 20 % of Californians are uninsured. Millions more are just one premium increase or a layoff away from losing coverage.
- Insurance premiums, driven by insurer and drug company bloat, are increasing two to three times faster than underlying medical inflation, such as hospital and doctor fees.
- HMOs and health insurers waste 25% of Californians' money on overhead and profit. Including duplicative administrative tasks forced on doctors and hospitals, as much as 50 percent of every dollar spent on health care is wasted.
- According to a state study, Californians could save \$8 billion dollars a year by eliminating waste, even after insuring everyone in a nonprofit and publicly accountable insurance pool.
- Emergency rooms are overloaded and underfunded because they are the provider of last resort for uninsured people who are forced to wait until illness is critical before seeking care. When the uninsured are finally allowed through the hospital doors, their conditions are more expensive to treat and good health outcomes are less likely.

It amazes and deeply disappoints us that even though the facts like these keep on proving again and again that private health care is more expensive, less accessible, less accountable, more wasteful and provides a lower level of health care, more and more the Provincial and Federal governments in Canada seem to promote the privatization of our health care system as a magic cure for all that ails it.

There is no magic cure. Governments in Canada need to stop wasting much needed resources on private health care, recommit to our public healthcare system and work with healthcare unions and their members to find real solutions to the problems within our public healthcare system.

Therefore, the PEI Federation of Labour, urges you to not take badly needed public monies away from our public system to waste exploring private options that have been shown time and time again not to be in the best interest of Islanders.

What we would like to see is this government put more public health care funds towards a long term strategy to provide for better training, recruitment, and

retention of health care professionals. The Province needs to do more to expose our young people to healthcare career opportunities at a young age and provide better funding to lessening the training costs to those interested in pursuing careers in healthcare especially in areas of shortage. You also need to make sure that everything possible is done to ensure that Island Healthcare workers are given working conditions, benefits, and wages that are competitive with the rest of Canada.

Student Attendant Pilot Project

-The Federation would also like to express its concern over the Student Attendant Pilot Project in the Eastern School District. Students with special educational needs are the most vulnerable in the school system and require consistency in their day to day scheduling. They also require someone to teach them daily life skills, which is presently being done by Educational Assistants with special training to teach these skills. To replace these trained professionals with what amounts to a low paid sitter will have a devastating effect on these students.

Therefore we urge you to stop wasting government funds on the Student Attendant Pilot Project and commit more funds to properly finance the Special Education program and allow for the hiring of more Educational Assistants.

Homeless Shelters

While the PEI Federation of Labour considers services like Homeless shelters and Food Banks as bandaid solutions to the problems facing low income Islanders, we do however recognize that they are indeed needed until real solutions can found.

We were very disappointed to see 2 homeless shelters (Harvest House and Nitapk House) close on PEI and one more (Grandmother's House) come very close to closing. We realize that your government is now in negotiations with the Native council to come up with long-term funding for the homeless shelters they run and we hope that your government will come up with long term funding to ensure all Islanders facing homelessness have a place to go.

But in the end what we would like to see coming out of this year's budget is not only funding to ensure that services like homeless shelters and food banks are there for those in need but also that this government is looking beyond these bandaid solutions towards finding real and permanent solutions to the problems facing low income Islanders.

Conclusion

We would also like to leave you with one last thing as you write this year's budget, it has been shown time and time again that Public services are best and most efficiently delivered by the public system. To that end, we hope that in this budget your government will recommit to ensuring that the public services that are so important to Islanders are properly funded and staffed and show that your government truly appreciates the skill and hard work that public employees put into delivering these services.

As always, the PEI Federation of Labour welcomes the opportunity to express the concerns brought to us by our 10,000 members to your government and we hope that with this budget your government will show that it is listening to Island workers and bring forth a budget that benefits all Islanders.