

Private member's bill defeated by government on nurse negotiations

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Liberal

Leader Yvonne Jones tabled a private member's bill on Wednesday in the House of Assembly, to remove all preconditions before the province resumes negotiations with the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses Union, later today.

The union recently received a strike mandate of about 90 per cent from its members.

During his budget speech last week, Finance Minister Jerome Kennedy made a new, impromptu offer to the nurses which raised the ire of both opposition parties and the union.

Kennedy and Premier Danny Williams have deflected criticism by saying the new offer addresses the union's two biggest concerns — recruitment and retention.

But both have said if the union wants to start from scratch, and take a lesser offer, the government will listen.

During Wednesday's debate, Opposition House leader Kelvin Parsons wondered if negotiations have soured even before they resume.

"It comes down to what is the atmosphere and what's the level of trust that's going to exist when the parties go into the bargaining room tomorrow," he said.

"The government's actions have been combative the whole way," Parsons said.

"This government is negotiating in public. They're saying they're not going to change the (bargaining) template. They change the template. They put conditions in. They take the conditions out, all in the public forum, when it ought to be done behind closed doors," he said.

"If you got to put on your boxing gloves behind closed doors, two parties, so be it."

Kennedy was one of the government members who spoke to the private member's bills.

"The patients of this province are our concern. The nurses of this province are our concern," Kennedy said.

Kennedy said the province is dealing with the issue in the best way that it can and hopes to avoid a nurses' strike.

"We came out and we offered an offer, which in this current economic climate is unheard of," he said.

In the end the government soundly voted the Liberal bill down.



Jerome Kennedy

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