

Liberals suggest ways to avoid nurses' strike

Offer to nurses was generous and government can't sweeten the deal anymore: Kennedy

THE TELEGRAM telegram@thetelegram.com

Liberal

Leader Yvonne Jones has asked the government to avoid an impending nurses' strike by dropping two controversial clauses the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses' Union is opposed to.

Jones put the questions to Finance Minister Jerome Kennedy as the House of Assembly reopened Monday.

But Kennedy said the issues of market adjustment and extended earnings loss have been agreed to by most of the province's other public sector unions.

Market adjustment would allow the government to pay a higher wage to a nurse who agrees to take a job in an area of the province which has a hard time attracting nurses.

The extended earnings loss clause allows government to terminate a nurse after they've been on disability for more than two years.

Kennedy said the clauses are part of an overall package.

"We feel this offer is most generous, in fact it's unheard of, Mr. Speaker, in these economic times," he said.

But Jones said fighting the union on these two issues is not worth risking a nurses strike and potentially endangering patient care.

She then asked Kennedy why he won't consider binding arbitration with the nurses to avoid a strike.

Kennedy didn't answer that question, but instead repeated that the offer to nurses was generous and the government can't sweeten the deal anymore then it already has.