

Parking fees debated in N.L. legislature

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The issue of parking equality for public employees arose in the house of assembly in St. John's Monday, after Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones said parking costs for court workers in the city's downtown were expected to soar.

"They have been notified, Mr. Speaker, that their fees will increase by \$600 this year. We know that the minister and the minister of justice have received correspondence from these workers," Jones said in question period. "We are asking today if they are prepared to consider implementing a parking rate for those employees that would be on par with that of which every other public sector employee pays?"

Jones asked that some special parking permit be considered for public employees who work elsewhere than the Confederation Building, which is outside the downtown with its own parking facilities.

"We would like to ask that some consideration be given, that if all other members of the public service are going to pay a regular parking permit fee, than why not those employees that have to be housed outside of Confederation Building?" Jones said.

Minister of Finance Jerome Kennedy responded, saying he was aware of parking difficulties downtown for people who work in the provincial court system. However, he said his sympathies lie with the lesser-paid worker.

"Some of these employees, Mr. Speaker, make considerably less money, but if she is talking about Crown prosecutors and legal aid lawyers who are making \$100,000 a year, than I certainly do not have the same sympathy I have for them as we do for individuals who are working in the offices," Kennedy said.

Jones reminded Kennedy that judges who were in the \$100,000 salary bracket already get free parking.

Parking in downtown St. John's is notoriously difficult, with office workers fighting for spaces with shoppers and retailers, especially in the Duckworth Street, Water Street and Harbour Drive area.

"Let me be clear on one point, and I think I may be able to speak for the premier on this one," Kennedy said. "The judges would not be getting their free parking if it was left to me. I have no sympathy for individuals who are making as much money as judges are making downtown getting free parking."

Kennedy did say that if there was any way to help the downtown workers with parking, the government would do so. However he also said that those workers do have a union to represent their interests, and the union was free to bring parking to the bargaining table as an issue.