

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2007

Sixtieth General Assembly

Second Session

2:00 P.M.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Human Resources.

HON. CAROLYN BOLIVAR-GETSON: Mr. Speaker, if I could, I'd like to make an introduction and I see they are just joining us now in the east gallery. I'd like to welcome guests to the House today. They are among the many people who are doing tremendous work to advance the Provincial Public Service's Healthy Workplace Initiatives.

From the Public Service Commission - and I would ask you to stand after I've introduced everyone - Joan Parks-Hubley, Rima Thomeh, Marriam Nauman, Maria Tendencia; there are also public service employees who participate on Healthy Workplace Committees throughout government: Adele Poirier, Dee Ryan-Meister, Suzy Farmer, Marilyn Robinson, Iona Stoddard, Linda Higgins, Michelle Thomason, Shirley Stoodley, Anna Babbin, Debbie Sampson, Patricia Harrington, Lisa MacDonald, Darlene Griffin, Deborah Barbour, Frank Reinhardt, Sheri Woodland, Susan Deveau, David Ervin, Tracey Williams, Janet Briggs, Rob Douglass, Heather Clarke, Janet Resk, Eileen Collette, David Sharpe, Ernie MacRae, Angela Birch, Rebecca Humphreys, Angela Smith, Jaqueline Estey; and some of our partners have also joined us today from the Atlantic Health & Wellness Institute - who is one of our partners in the Department of Justice research project - Jean Petrie; and the local representative of the National Quality Institute, Mary-Lou MacDonald.

If I've missed someone, please stand up, I apologize and I'd like to welcome you all to the House and thank you. (Standing Ovation)

Mr. Speaker, there are many strategies needed to achieve a healthier Nova Scotia. I'd like to recognize one particular strategy where the Nova Scotia Government has been leading the way: workplace health. One of our government's five human resource goals is to provide a safe and supportive workplace for employees through a comprehensive healthy workplace approach.

As one of the largest employers in Nova Scotia, promoting and supporting government employees through healthy workplace initiatives can have a number of positive results, not the least of which is a domino effect on employees' families and communities in which they live.

Over the past few years a significant amount of work has taken place to advance the healthy workplace agenda across the Public Service. In recognition of the province's work, last March

we attained level one certification from the National Quality Institute's Healthy Workplace Progressive Excellence Program, and I am proud to say that no other provincial government has ever achieved this certification.(Applause)

Mr. Speaker, for the next few moments I will try to provide an overview of the healthy workplace initiative.

The Public Service Commission's Healthy Workplace coordination office has implemented several initiatives in the past few years, including:

- a quarterly newsletter and healthy workplace Web site for all employees;
- a Take Back the Lunch Break campaign;
- an awareness campaign for managers called Be the Manager You'd Love to Have, with a self-assessment tool;
- a course and support program for employees who are caregivers when they go home;
- a Healthy Eating in the Workplace Guide; and
- ongoing training and support for departmental healthy workplace committees.

This past Spring the Nova Scotia Government implemented a corporate healthy workplace policy with accountabilities for senior leaders to engage their employees in finding ways to improve their unique work environment. From that policy comes one of the greatest strengths and a sign of long-term sustainability - each department and many agencies now have employee-driven, leadership-sponsored healthy workplace committees that help advance the programs and issues important to their co-workers.

Just some examples of committee work include: health risk assessments; wellness fairs and exhibits; departmental healthy workplace plans; walking clubs and fitness challenges; weight management programs; and healthy catering guidelines.

As well, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice is involved in the largest research project in Canada on implementing sustainable healthy workplace programs. This project is sponsored by private and public partners and led by the Atlantic Health and Wellness Institute. The research project is in the third of its four years.

There are several other programs that complement the healthy workplace approach but are not new at all. Things like: an Employee Assistance Program, which is available to all employees and their families 24/7; a well-established Occupational Health and Safety Program; our focus on diversity, which received special mention from the National Quality Institute; a corporate emphasis on employee recognition; access to ongoing training and career development; regular employee surveys; and a Department of Health pilot project on mental health in the workplace. These are just a few of them.

Mr. Speaker, these examples illustrate that workplace health goes beyond health and safety programs, and it's not just about one's personal health. We want to ensure that our employees feel

safe and supported in the workplace so that they can focus on what's really important, which is providing high-quality service to all Nova Scotians.

Employees who are well trained, supported and recognized for their successes, want to contribute at the highest potential. They want to stay longer, and many stay longer because they are healthier and more satisfied at work. We hope that a healthier workplace will help establish the provincial government as a preferred employer, which would be a payoff when recruiting new employees to our Public Service.

All said, Mr. Speaker, a message we would like to share with employees, employers, other Public Service providers, members of the House, and all Nova Scotians is that workplace health is worth the effort and the right thing to do. (Applause)

As great as it is to be recognized for having reached level one of the National Quality Institute award, we won't stop here. There are four levels, and I have no doubt that with the commitment of the Public Service employees involved, and this government, levels two, three and four will be within our reach within the next few years.

Mr. Speaker, we want government's example to be an inspiration to other employers around the province, both large and small. In future, we will work more closely to build partnerships between the private and public sectors so that we can build on each other's successes, which will truly make a difference in the health of Nova Scotians.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate and thank all the speakers in the east gallery, and across government, who have worked so hard to make sure we were recognized by the National Quality Institute. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Nova.

MR. GORDON GOSSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join the minister in welcoming members to this House today from the Public Service Commission, the Atlantic Health and Wellness Institute, and the National Quality Institute. I think it's important that we have government employees here today because the history of workplace safety and workplace health in this province has always been that - it's the employees themselves who bring issues of workplace health and safety to the attention of government employers, it is the employees themselves who have worked often, with great resistance, to improve their workplace environment and make it a safer place for them to work.

I welcome the fact there is a growing recognition of importance of healthy workplaces to the overall health of Nova Scotians. I recognize that there are many facets to healthy workplaces, but the physical environment in which people work remains very important.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the minister has raised this very topical issue here in the

House today. As I speak here today, there are Nova Scotia Government workers who are without a collective agreement. They are protected by the Labour Standards Code. It often comes as a shock to people to learn that in the Labour Standards Code, there is no requirement in the Labour Standards Code that workers get a paid lunch break. I would like to make that point here today.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that the minister has brought this topic forward and I'm very pleased with the award that the employees have initiated to win in this province. Again, I trust that in addition to accepting the awards that the minister go up in the gallery and across the street and listen to the workplace health concerns of employees in our excellent Civil Service and I thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly like to welcome to the House today the members of the Public Service Commission, and recognize those workers who have made a difference to their workplace and also to the work of the ministry, to recognize these people and to point out the programs that have been brought forward.

Wellness and well-being are a critical part of our workplaces and to see the Public Service leading Nova Scotia with this award and with stated goals that they want for their workplaces is, indeed, admirable and one that hopefully again we can stay as a leader in the country. Anytime that workplace health is avoided, absenteeism and stressors really do show forth. So some of the initiatives that the minister has pointed out today, I think, are great measures to improve the workplace so that stress and chronic absenteeism can be eliminated.

There is no question that in future contracts that our public employees will be negotiating, will have workplace health and what is required, I think, getting close to the top of their list. We are going to see people in the Public Service, now that mandatory retirement is being eliminated, are going to stay in the workplace longer and they will only stay there if they are healthy. So the work being done on the part of the ministry and the workers themselves is indeed to be complimented, and I thank the minister for bringing this statement to the floor of the Legislature. Thank you. (Applause)