

# AN OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED

Despite all the flak the Progressive Conservative government is receiving for its current actions and inactions, there is - or was - an opportunity to do something positive.

The New Brunswick Association of Home Care Workers issued a press release last week, outlining its displeasure with the government's continued failure to recognise the substandard wages earned by home-care support workers.

These individuals provide top-quality, hands-on care to some of the most vulnerable members of society - our aging seniors.

Recently, the province mandated these individuals undertake a higher degree of training, which is fair and reasonable: people expect workers to be qualified for the jobs they perform. However, the province has refused to tweak its budgets to allow the workers a reasonable wage. Instead, professionals with considerable experience in some cases, and now more training, are consigned to earning \$11 per hour.

The association rightly points out the efforts of home-care support workers goes a long way to reducing the stress on the costly care-home infrastructure. On that note, the government has spent considerable sums to build care homes, but precious little on efforts to keep seniors out of those expensive facilities.

Against that backdrop, the government's self-promotion about fiscal prudence falls flat when it comes to home support workers. After all, who would want to enter a job where the ceiling is barely above minimum wage?

There are many groups upset by the obvious lack of direction from Fredericton and its growing service cuts without explanation or consultation and, as with the Grand Manan ferry, cuts without any reasonable degree of logical or defensible financial justification.

Here is a chance for the David Alward regime to change its image - something desperately needed after a wave of baffling decisions (Margaret-Ann Blaney, Grand Manan ferry cuts, health centre service reductions, etc.).

By publicly calling for wage increases, the New Brunswick Association of Home Care Workers has presented an opportunity for the government to fulfil a promise - and perhaps repair its tarnished image as well. Certainly, addressing the home-care worker wage requests would counter the growing perception that the PCs are indifferent to the plight of the front-line, cash-strapped worker in this province: this would be the right thing to do, as well as politically expedient for a government much in need of a little positive publicity.

-Faulkner