

Atlantic Alert - Quick 5 Political Musings

1. Tough decision recently by the NB government not to rebuild the Perth-Andover hospital on higher ground after it incurred extensive flood damage last year. Agreement could not be reached with stakeholders on a smaller hospital with fewer services prompting the government to balk at escalating costs for a similar sized hospital. Tough call indeed but one which should necessitate broader health care restructuring or, more directly, what services to offer in what communities since all services cannot be offered in every hospital given financial realities of the province.

2. Still on New Brunswick health care, physicians are challenging the province's decision to cap the fee-for-service they are allowed to bill the province as part of the province's austerity program. While no one likes caps, one wonders if physicians might find it more fruitful to work with government to find ways for controlling costs. After all, who knows the systems better than physicians?

3. While on the subject of capping fees, St. Thomas University has

announced plans to ignore the province's cap on tuition increases (\$150). The \$434 it is planning to raise tuition next year is almost triple what is allowable. It will be interesting to see how the Alward government responds. Will it deduct the illegal increase from other transfers it provides the university?

4. Huge deficits and debt in New Brunswick, battles with physicians, battles with universities and the anti-fracking movement not to mention a luke warm response to federal EI changes, you wonder if the Alward Conservatives are winning the war? With an election next year, we will soon find out.

5. What to make of Defence Minister Peter MacKay's announcements to improve Search & Rescue services on the heels of a scathing Auditor General's report? No doubt logistical improvements will help but do we have any reliable helicopters ready for use? Moreover, why did it take an AG's report for changes to occur? Is the Minister hiding something? This S&R boondoggle will surely renew calls to privatize the service as other countries have done.