

## **BRIEF REMARKS TO THE LEGISLATURE**

**(8/18/09)**

**I want to thank you for letting me speak today and for the work all of you do. I am here to ask you to consider a few ideas that may serve the people of the State better than what has been proposed by the Governor.**

**First, since there are over 621 thousand people living in Vermont, I feel it is inherently unfair to try and solve our financial problems by firing some hundreds of State Employees who work so hard for the people .**

**The Governor's Plan to fire these workers pre-dates the Country's financial melt-down and has little to do with saving money. He could save more by ending the expensive, private Contract Work, which is not part of the official budget. State Employees can do this work and do it for less.**

**It is ironic, at best, that just when Vermonters need more help from the State, Governor Douglas would eliminate many of the folks who would provide this help, and instead, add them to the unemployment rolls.**

**I am very familiar with another Plan that the Governor has been pushing for years, which is very expensive and has little likelihood of succeeding: Replacing the Vermont State Hospital with private hospitals.**

**This Plan is deeply flawed for a number of reasons.**

**First, the Private Hospitals he is counting on to replace VSH will not admit and treat the typical State Hospital patient. VSH currently admits over 200 people a year, precisely because these private hospitals cannot or will not admit them. VSH has been filled to capacity for weeks. Last week ended with 53 patients in the 54 bed State Hospital. The private hospitals were also filled to capacity with the type of patient they can work with, which shows that our current In-patient capacity is strained to the max.**

**Second, The so-called "Futures Plan" that was supposed to take us years down the road does not provide enough In-patient capacity to do that. In addition to Vermont's always expanding population, we are seeing a huge rise in severe mental health issues among our returning**

**soldiers, including rising suicide rates, which are a national concern as well. The lack of a "safety backup" by hospitals is having an effect on CMHC's and Private Mental Health Practitioners as well. Our Mental Health System has always required an effective balance between In-patient and Out-patient capacity to do its job effectively, safely and well.**

**Third, the Governor's Plan was estimated to cost \$85 to \$100 million back in 2008, when the POC forced the Administration to finally divulge the cost. While, at the same time, a Proposal from VSEA to build a brand new, state of the art, architecturally therapeutic 70 bed hospital on State land for an actual cost of \$29 million was dismissed out of hand by the Governor's "Team." This Proposal would save the state \$70 million, provide a stimulus to the local construction industry, and provide many needed jobs, as well.**

**The Douglas Administration keeps spending sums of money to study the "feasibility" of this Plan. If the Governor gets to put this Plan into effect it will also cost far more operationally than does VSH. Per Diem Rates between hospitals are not really equivalent.**

**I urge all of you to look at these issues in a more thoughtful, more long-term way, that is less destructive of our social infrastructure, and more effective in serving the needs of our most vulnerable Vermonters in the years to come.**

**Thank You.**

**Laurence E. Thomson Ph.D.**