

NEWS

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Dicey dispute

Jones says the people stand to suffer most in nurses/province clash

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The Aurora

As nurses in this province are set to take a strike vote beginning next week and the province has taken its offer off the table in failed negotiations, Yvonne Jones is worried.

The Liberal leader says the premier's attitude towards the nurses has been absolutely wrong since NLNU began negotiations for a new contract and innocent people will be the ones to suffer if it's not resolved.

"They [government negotiators] have been threatening nurses since the beginning of this process and trying to force them into a collective agreement and we all know that is not how bargaining works," said Jones. "It takes negotiating on both sides and we've seen no effort by government to do that with the nurses. At the end of the day, it's the people who have to use this service, are the ones who are going to suffer."

Jones said while visiting Labrador West last week she learned of five nurses who plan on leaving the local hospital, and that is a story she hears throughout the province. There are recruitment issues as it is right now that are causing serious problems and delays in healthcare, she pointed out.

"Every day we get calls from people who can't get into a hospital, can't get an operation, or their surgeries are cancelled," reported the Opposition Leader. "We hear there are not enough beds and they can't open more beds because there is not enough nurses. I meant it's on the front lines where this is really going to be felt and I think it is time for the premier, the government and the nurses union to realize the real people effected here are the ones depending on the system and more effort will have to be made on both sides. But, most importantly efforts must be made on the side of government that holds the purse strings and the power in these negotiations."

Jones said the premier can't use the \$1.6 billion the province may lose in changes to the equalization rules the federal government announced last week as an excuse in negotiating wages.

"That argument holds no weight," said Jones. "Whenever government goes to negotiate, they should be able to do it within their own budgetary means and it shouldn't be contingent on what we are going to get this year or in 10 years from the federal government."

Jones pointed out if contracts the government negotiated were contingent on what the federal budget offered then it would mean rollbacks in other contracts the province has signed off on.

"I don't believe it for a minute," she said. "I think he used it as an excuse and another way to target and threaten nurses in the province and the public shouldn't tolerate that."

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