

# Health cuts questioned in House

**Oram says closures in Lewisporte, Flower's Cove final**  
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*Yvonne Jones*

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## THE TELEGRAM

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Health Minister Paul Oram says cuts to health services in central Newfoundland and on the Northern Peninsula are a done deal and he won't be changing his mind.

Last week, the province announced it will close the X-ray and laboratory services in Lewisporte and cut the hours of the clinic in Flower's Cove from 24 to 12 hours a day. That led to protests in both towns. In the House of Assembly Tuesday, Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones asked Oram to reconsider the cuts rural areas.

But Oram said the issue had to be put in perspective and noted the government is spending money on a longterm care facility in Lewisporte.

He also said the cuts are to "streamline" services to make them of better quality and to save public money.

"We feel very, very comfortable with what we are doing and it is a final decision," Oram told the House. "It's the right decision for the people of the area. It's the right decision for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador." Jones wasn't impressed. "I don't believe the rationale I'm hearing from the government when you say to people because we're giving you infrastructure in your community it entitles us to take something away," replied Jones. "It's an absolutely ridiculous statement."

Outside the House, Oram suggested to reporters that by moving the services to bigger centres such as Gander or Grand Falls-Windsor the service would be enhanced for everybody, including the people of Lewisporte.

"People would like to have every service in their backyard," he said. "Everybody would like to have a hospital in their hometown.

"We can't provide that kind of service to every community in Newfoundland and Labrador — there's only so much money to go around."

Oram also said the province is reviewing the healthcare system — including X-ray and laboratory services — to see if it can be run more efficiently.

He said any money saved would be reinvested into health, possibly on equipment such as MRIs or dialysis machines.

When asked if he was concerned about doctors who have threatened to resign over the cuts in the rural areas, Oram said he hopes the doctors will decide to stay, but that the government won't be "dictated" to.

"These people are employed by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We appreciate their services. However ... we can recruit more physicians," he said.

Oram also suggested the cuts may reduce the workload of those rural doctors.

Flower's Cove Mayor Keith Billard was in the public gallery during the debate and wasn't happy with what he heard from Oram.

"It was the most ridiculous statement I've ever heard from a minister, saying

that he's streamlining the system to better help the people," said Billard. "It's totally ridiculous, what he's doing, and not helping nobody."

Billard is also angry his MHA, Transportation Minister Trevor Taylor, is not speaking out against the reduced hours.

Billard said because the winter driving conditions are often so bad on the Northern Peninsula that the extra hour drive between Flower's Cove and the hospital in St. Anthony at night could cost lives.

When Jones was asking questions on the issue, Taylor was heckling her.

In mid sentence, Jones retorted, "Why don't you go meet with your constituents in Flower's Cove and explain to them why you're closing their service, as opposed to shouting at me across the House of Assembly."