

Province targeting rural health: Jones

BY DAVE BARTLETT dbartlett@thetelegram.com

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Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones says the province doesn't need to save money by cutting health services in rural areas, but is doing so anyway.

"This is a government that is very consciously looking at cutting rural health care," Jones told The Telegram Monday.

"This is a government who has money to spend," she said. "They're spending it in every way, shape and form including buying equity in oil exploration and oil development companies."

Over the last few weeks, the province has been criticized by opposition parties and people who live in or near Lewisporte in the central region and Flower's Cove on the Northern Peninsula. Those two towns recently found out some of their health services were being cut.

Late Friday afternoon, the Department of Health issued a news release, including two letters from Central Health, which it said showed its board approved the cuts in Lewisporte.

One letter outlines 14 possible ways the authority can save money.

However the other letter — from Central Health's chairman Robert Woolfrey — states that "none of these measures can be enacted without significant impact on either our internal or external communities. While we acknowledge the fiscal positions of the province, this has to be balanced with the expectations of the citizens with regards to delivery of health services."

Jones called the timing of the release hypocritical as Premier Danny Williams "ridiculed" Eastern Health for doing the same thing in April — it issued a news release late on a Friday without making anyone available to answer questions.

At the time, Williams went so far as to say officials at Eastern Health "should be shot."

"If you're going to expect a standard from those around you, then you need to lead by example," said Jones.

Jones also criticized the province for releasing the list of recommendations without an explanation of whether any of the other cuts are being considered.

"It just leaves a whole lot more questions and no answers in my opinion," she said.

Jones noted the documents released Friday did not contain any correspondence from the province to Central Health.

She said that adds to her suspicion that Central Health is being pressured by the province to save money, which she thinks the authority is doing reluctantly.



Yvonne Jones