



Opposition Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones speaks to the media at the House of Assembly Tuesday afternoon. — Photo by Keith Gosse/The Telegram

HEALTH/POLITICS

Not enough extra funding for health facilities: Jones

By JAMIE BAKER
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Liberal Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones is welcoming commitments from the Williams administration to increase funding for the maintenance and repair of provincial health facilities, but she says it is not nearly enough.

A 2005 consultant report — which was made public recently after it was referred to by Health Minister Ross Wiseman in a media scrum — identified well over \$100 million of upgrades needed for four Eastern Health hospitals.

It was believed that more than \$70 million of those upgrades were of the near-critical variety.

On March 1, Premier Danny Williams told The Telegram that the government would increase the overall budget for hospital maintenance and repairs from about \$14 million to roughly \$20 million to address “critical, urgent issues.”

Jones says much more is needed.

“Just with the critical upgrades that were identified in 2005 it was up to \$100 million in investment,” Jones said, calling for a comprehensive plan on how government will tackle the problem, not just for Eastern Health, but the province as a whole.

“Two years have passed, it’s unlikely any of that work has been completed and in fact most of the conditions that were assessed at

that time have probably deteriorated since,” she said.

Williams said the reason the province is looking at a budget of just over \$20 million is because that was the updated number recently provided by officials in the Department of Health.

“At that point our budget was in the \$12-million to \$14-million range and the number put before me was in the \$22-million to \$23-million range,” Williams said.

“If the department revisits that and the minister of health comes back to me and says he got back to his officials and they’ve gone back again and that number has increased, then we would certainly reconsider that number.

“If that number is a moving target then we will move with it, provided it’s reasonable.”

As for the Waterford Hospital, Williams said he doesn’t see the facility becoming part of the capital projects plan at any point in the next two years.

“We have a long-term plan — as a government and as a cabinet — of the amount of money that we can spend. But the difficult part then becomes, what do you spend it on and what time frames?” Williams said.

Jones also took shots at the way the report came to light, and criticized the province for not having a better protocol in place to make sure important reports are

brought to the full attention of cabinet.

She even went as far as to suggest that the issue be taken “out of the hands” of Wiseman and placed “into the hands” of Williams, himself.

“If those kinds of reports are being done on health-care facilities in our province and going into a Department of Health where the minister doesn’t see a priority to read the document, then I’m really concerned about it,” Jones said.

“When important critical infrastructure upgrades are identified in our health-care sector and are being ignored or buried in the department for up to two years, I would have to say ... it is time to get briefed on the issues, get a good understanding of what’s going on and look at where the critical gaps are that need to be addressed.”

Williams said the Eastern Health study didn’t come to the cabinet table as a report, per se, and that it was only referenced casually “as a side issue” part of a funding application from the Health Department.

He said expecting him to vet every single thing that comes to cabinet from every department is unreasonable.

“It would be nice in an ideal world if everybody in government could inform me of every major problem there is, but you know, unfortunately, that’s just not possible.”

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