

Eject minister from health job, Liberal leader says

Premier defends Wiseman

By ROB ANTLE
THE TELEGRAM

Health Minister Ross Wiseman should be turfed from his portfolio for how he dealt with cancer-testing woes, Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones said Monday.

"I think that any time there's obvious levels of incompetence being displayed by a minister of the Crown, it's incumbent upon the premier to take some action," Jones told reporters at the House of Assembly.

And what action should that be?

"That action, in my opinion today, should be removing him as the minister of health," Jones responded.

Earlier, during question period, Jones sparred with Premier Danny Williams over Wiseman's job performance.

Williams defended his minister, describing Wiseman's work as "excellent."

Last week, Wiseman told the Cameron Inquiry he did not read his briefing notes on cancer-testing problems until months after he took over the portfolio in January 2007.

Jones put the question to Williams



Premier Danny Williams speaks to reporters outside the House of Assembly Monday. — Photo by Gary Hebbard/The Telegram

in the House, "I ask the premier today: do you expect your ministers to read their briefing notes when they're in charge of a department?"

The premier replied that ministers are expected to read their briefing notes, but discretion must be made

for their existing knowledge about a particular subject. Wiseman served years as parliamentary secretary to the health minister before moving up to the No. 1 position.

"You have to expect ministers, all ministers, to do their jobs and to do

their jobs properly," Williams told the House.

"I don't babysit them. I don't go down and don't ask them a quiz the next morning: 'Did you read your briefing note? Here's the questions on it.' Because I can't do that."

Jones later charged that Wiseman was not aware of what was going on in his department. She asked Williams what he was going to do about Wiseman's "clear level of incompetence."

The premier replied, "Let me state very clearly for the record that this minister ... in my opinion, has done an absolutely outstanding job."

Williams said Wiseman has "stood in this House day after day after day, when the sands were shifting under his feet, when information was changing from Eastern Health, trying to present it to members of the House of Assembly, presenting it to the public to the best of his ability, at a time when he was being provided misinformation by Eastern Health ...

"As a matter of fact, I wouldn't put anybody else in that position other than him right now in this government, because he's done an outstanding job."

Wiseman was not at the legislature Monday. He was instead on the witness stand providing testimony at the Cameron Inquiry.