

PREM. - RURAL ERS: 24/7 OPENING - PROMISE KEEP

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. People who live in rural Nova Scotia are nervous about their emergency rooms and they should be. Dr. John Ross released his report this week and identified 14 ERs as candidates for closure at night, to be replaced by a model of care that does not exist as of yet. Nova Scotians need assurance that their ERs will stay open as promised by the Premier. My question to the Premier is, will you stand by your promise to keep rural ERs open, 24-7?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we are going to keep ERs open.

[3:30 p.m.]

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I asked him to reassure rural Nova Scotians that their ERs would be kept open 24/7 and somehow the Premier may have cut his answer a bit short. I hope when he stands up he will continue to reply and reassure those Nova Scotians that their emergency rooms will remain open 24/7, as he committed to during an election campaign.

The government is asking the Department of Health to come up with a 5 per cent cut in its budget this year and next year and the year after. My question to the Premier is, are those savings going to come at the expense of rural Nova Scotians and their access to emergency health care?

THE PREMIER: The answer for the Leader of the Official Opposition is, no, it's not going to come at the expense of rural Nova Scotia. We have asked the district health authorities to take their role in making sure that this province gets back to balance. The simply reality is that for years we have watched while spending has increased without the necessary increase in revenues to be able to support them. We're engaged in an exercise that will make sure that this province is put back on a firm physical foundation.

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MR. MCNEIL: Many Nova Scotians have tuned out from the democratic process. It's embarrassing that the Premier has tuned out and forgot the fact that he promised Nova Scotians that their emergency room would be open 24/7. You can't backpedal away from it. That was the commitment that you made to Nova Scotians, that their emergency room in every community across this province would be open 24/7.

When asked how his recommendations dovetailed with the Premier's promise to keep emergency rooms open 24/7, Dr. Ross answered, "I kind of ignored that part." My question to the Premier is, are you going to keep your commitment to the people of Nova Scotia or, like Dr. Ross, are you just going to ignore your promise?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, like many people in this House, I was here and watched while the Liberals cut hospital beds, while they laid off nurses, while they punished the people of Nova Scotia with unfair health care cutbacks. We said very clearly during the election that we are going to protect health care, that we are going to make sure that emergency rooms stay open, that the lights will be on and the doors will be open in emergency rooms.