

Fourth Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
Official Report
(Hansard)

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Man.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	Ind.
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen, Hon.	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle	Arthur-Virden	PC
REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 6, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Madam Speaker: O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Please be seated. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: It—the honourable Official Opposition House Leader?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Good morning, Madam Speaker.

I move, seconded by—[*interjection*] Sorry.

Madam Speaker, is there—[*interjection*]—no.

Madam Speaker, this morning I call Bill 200 for debate.

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 200—The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act

Madam Speaker: It has been announced that the House will consider Bill 200 this morning for second reading.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Good morning.

I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that Bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act, be now read a second time and be referred to committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Fontaine: It is my honour to stand in the House this morning, on December 6 no less, where across Canada we recognize violence against women in all of its form to rise today to debate Bill 200, the safe access to abortion act.

Before I begin, I would like to dedicate Bill 200 to women and girls across the world, but certainly here in Canada, who have lost their lives in the process of

seeking out at one point what was considered illegal abortions. The state put women and girls in a position where they were not able to access reproductive health of their choice. And, actually, it's a history that, I think, bears repeating that in the fight to legalize abortion services and have access to abortion services, many women and girls lost their lives.

And so, Madam Speaker, Bill 200 is dedicated to all of those women and girls.

Bill 200, the safe access to abortion act, establishes buffer zones or safety perimeters around any clinic, hospital or health-care facility offering abortion services to Manitoba women and girls, while prohibiting any protesting, demonstrating or picketing within these zones, and strengthens protections for patients and health-care providers against harassment, bullying, intimidation, shame and molestation.

I think I have made myself perfectly clear in this House that I will continue to stand for Manitoba women and girls' rights to access reproductive health in all of its forms, and certainly Bill 200 is just one of many things that we need to do to ensure that women and girls in Manitoba have access—a robust and comprehensive access—to reproductive health.

Manitoba women and girls deserve to be safe and protected while seeking health care—Manitoba's health care. And this bill also, I think, strikes the right balance in respect of protecting health-care providers' rights to access their place of employment free of harassment and intimidation and bullying. And so I'm very proud to stand in this House today to debate Bill 200.

I look forward to hearing members opposite get up in the House and support this bill as well because, as I've heard many times in this House from members opposite who purport to stand with women and girls and who purport to protect women and girls' human rights, and—access to abortion and abortion service in an unmolested manner is a human right of Manitoba woman and girls.

So I look forward to hearing their thoughtful and supportive comments this morning. I look forward to this bill being sent to committee and having an opportunity to hear from the public in respect of their concerns, recommendations or support of the bill either way.

I know that since I introduced Bill 200, I have been bombarded with predominantly positive emails and social media commentary, and even people just stopping me everywhere I go—predominantly women—many men, actually, as well, Madam Speaker—thanking me for bringing this bill forward.

I'm so pleased to see that Manitobans, and as a country, we've come to a place where we understand that it is the fundamental right of women and girls to choose whatever reproductive choices they make.

And there's actually only been a couple of emails that I've received that weren't so kind and were an attempt to silence or shame or intimidate me. If anybody knows me, you'll know that that actually doesn't do anything to me. It actually makes me even more determined to stand in this House and bring forward legislation that protects the rights of Manitoba women and girls.

So I welcome all emails and social media commentary. It does nothing to me. It actually only shows that it's unfortunate that we have people that will take the time to harass a legislator.

Now, that's my job. I get that. But imagine, then, women and girls who are seeking abortion services who, after having made what are very difficult decisions—for many women, the choice is a robust choice that they go through everything in respect of whether or not they're going to choose to continue on with the pregnancy or going to choose to have an abortion. Regardless, it is a difficult decision.

* (10:10)

So imagine, Madam Speaker, you know, on your way to seeking—as is your right—health care, you have to go through protesters—anti-choice protesters. And I know that it is—there's been some commentary—particularly in the media from anti-choice protesters—that they don't bother anybody, that they just sit there and they pray and they just don't bother anybody that's walking into the hospital.

That's not true, Madam Speaker. We know and I have personally witnessed protesters who have made comments to women walking into the women's health hospital on Notre Dame.

Now here's the thing, Madam Speaker, and actually it was a very good question from a member of the media who asked me: well, how do they know that this particular woman or girl is going in for an abortion? Absolutely right, that's an excellent question. Women and girls are not going to be writing it on a

sign saying, hey, I'm accessing this health-care facility to get an abortion.

But that is the material point. The material point is that every woman or girl that happens to be going into that particular health-care facility is bombarded with very—with often very violent imagery and comments as you're walking to access health care.

I read into the record a woman who talked about how her twins were premature and so she would have to go back and forth to the hospital, and she talked about how she had to go through the protesters and how it was a horrible experience for her.

So it is not only women and girls that are accessing abortion services but all women and girls accessing any Manitoba health-care services in these particular facilities. It is also health-care providers that have to go through this day in and day out as they access their place of employment. That is not good. It is often very stressful on health-care providers to go through that barrage of protesters.

This legislation is similar to legislation in Ontario, BC, Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec. I think that it is time as we near 2019 that Manitoba get on board with other provinces in respect of looking at reproductive rights, and certainly this is one piece of the legislation.

And I would be remiss in the last couple of minutes that I have to not connect this as well to this government's lack of strategy in respect of Mifegymiso and what seems to be a clear indication of their ideology on abortion and not providing Mifegymiso free and fully to Manitoba women and girls.

Finally, I just want to acknowledge, as I dedicated this earlier, to women who have lost their lives. I also want to dedicate this bill to all the health-care providers who offer abortion services in Manitoba. I had the lovely opportunity to meet about 30 doctors, that they're going to be doctors in the future here in Manitoba. They're medical students.

And I also had the opportunity to meet with about five abortion doctors, and I'm blessed to know them. And what is so encouraging, Madam Speaker, is that all of those students talked about their commitment and dedication to ensuring that Manitoba women and girls have full access to reproductive services here in Manitoba, including abortion.

So, to them and to all health-care providers working on behalf of Manitoba women and girls, I lift

each and every one of them up and I say miigwech for their important work.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask one question and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): The NDP had 17 years to bring in similar legislation and they never even considered this an option. I'm curious as to why they are making it an option now.

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Thank you to the member for the question.

Quite simply, I wasn't an MLA for 17 years. I've only been an MLA now for two years and it is my priority. And the members can laugh—*[interjection]* I'm not sure who was giggling over there—but it is my priority, and my caucus colleagues know that that is a No. 1 priority of myself personally, to ensure that Manitoba women and girls have full access to reproductive health, including abortion services, and that they're able to access that health care safely.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I just want to thank my sister colleague here from St. Johns for bringing this very, very important bill forward and for listening to Manitoba women and for providing choice. And I'd ask her to tell us, you know, why is it so important for this bill to come forward?

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech to the member, my sister colleague from—the member for Point Douglas.

You know, as I indicated in my speech, it is important to have this bill legislated and on the records to be—to ensure that Manitoba women and girls' access to health care in all of its forms is respected and that women and girls are able to access that health care safely, without bullying and intimidation and shame.

Gone are the days when people tell women and girls what they can do with their bodies. It is almost 2019. This House has to stand on the side of Manitoba women and girls.

Mrs. Smith: Again, I just want to say how much I love my sister colleague and that, you know, this is something that should've been done a while ago.

Working in the child-welfare system, you know, and having to cross those very lines with kids who, you know, found themselves in a situation that, you know, perhaps, you know, they were at a drinking party and became pregnant and it wasn't something that they chose. And they were very young.

So I'm wondering if the member could talk to us about similar buffer zones in legislation in other parts of Canada.

Ms. Fontaine: As I indicated, there is similar legislation in various parts of the country: Ontario, BC, Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec have similar legislation.

And I know that often there's this discussion in respect of restricting freedom of speech. We have not seen any Charter challenges in respect of those jurisdictions' legislation. Folks are still welcome to protest, just not within those buffer zones.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): The member for St. Johns said this about protests and freedom of speech, and I quote: I've been protesting for 20 years. I've had my children protesting. So I understand the need and the right of individuals to protest for something they feel is important to them. I get that. I support that. End quote.

Does the member think these freedoms should be safeguarded?

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech the member for that question.

I'm actually very proud of all of the activist work that I've been doing, well over 20 years. I'm proud that my boys have been on the front lines of—with their mother, seeing their mother fight for women and girls' rights in all of its myriads of form.

So I understand the need and the historical role of protesting in any society. And as I've indicated, this legislation does not prohibit protesting. It just designates buffer zones on where people can protest, ensuring that Manitoba women and girls can access health care in Manitoba.

Mrs. Smith: As someone who had to cross those picket lines—you know, I had a miscarriage, three of them, in fact, and every time I had one, I had to cross that line and to hear people yelling and saying things to you. I didn't have a baby bump, so people

automatically, you know, judged that I was going in there to have a—or, to have an abortion, when, in fact, I was going for a D and C.

So will the member tell us how—have there been incidents in the past that suggest that this bill could help protect women and service providers from, you know, this very thing happening to other women?

Ms. Fontaine: Look, we—miigwech to the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) for sharing such personal details in this House, and I think that that's an illustration of how important this bill is.

We know that there's a current climate across North America right now that is on the cusp of trying to open up again the abortion debate. We see it particularly in the States.

And what we see, as well, is that the aggression in respect of trying to thwart or limit or restrict women's access to abortion services is growing in this—in—across North America. This bill helps prevent that.

*(10:20)

You know, people will say, well—not—that can't happen in Canada. It is a very thin razor line of when people will go over—

Madam Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Further questions?

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): The legislation like this has been in place in other provinces like BC for quite a number of years and, perhaps, the member could talk to us a little bit about the experience in the other provinces.

Ms. Fontaine: Miigwech to the member for River Heights for his question.

I think what we've seen in other jurisdictions is, in these buffer zones, is that women and girls who are accessing abortion services are feeling more safe and secure in being able to access those services.

What we've actually seen also in Ontario, I know that there's actually anti—an anti-choice group that is actually currently lobbying Premier Doug Ford to actually amend the act and get rid of it.

So, again, I think that it's very important that we are diligent in respect of ensuring women and girls' rights to access abortion services safely.

Madam Speaker: Further questions?

Debate

Madam Speaker: If there are no further questions, debate is open.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Certainly, I am pleased to put a few words on the record today in regards to Bill 200.

From the outset, Madam Speaker, I will say that the freedom of citizens to protest is really a precious thing and it really is a precious thing in our democracy, and we firmly believe that that freedom should be safeguarded and should be especially safeguarded when we recognize that we may not always agree with the people that are actually doing the protesting. And that's what happens in democracy: we don't always agree, but we are free to express our opinions.

Doing away with people's freedoms is something that we should be very, very careful not to do. I recognize the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) is addressing a problem that in her mind exists for one group, but failing to recognize that there's a slippery slope here in taking away the freedoms of citizens to exercise their rights and to express their views.

Madam Speaker, we see it every day around the world: people's right to express their freedom, freedom of speech. We'll watch the news on a daily basis and we see it all around the world in so many countries where people come out in the streets and they express their opinion on a certain issue, and that's very important and it's important that people get those messages, that government get those messages.

Madam Speaker, I know the member referenced bullying in her speech this morning. Obviously, bullying happens. It happens in workplaces and it shouldn't happen in workplaces. Certainly, from our perspective as a government, we've taken a very strong stance in terms of bullying and inappropriate conduct, in terms of the Legislature and work in the Legislature.

We recognize there's been issues that have come to the front in the past and recently. We believe those issues should be dealt with appropriately. They should get dealt with quickly, and we know in the past there's been a cover-up in terms of some of those actions that have been brought forward. So we certainly as a government recognize that those situations should be dealt with appropriately.

As a government we've taken an open-door policy to that. There's no wrong door. These particular issues should be dealt with; they should be brought forward

and dealt with appropriately, and we've certainly taking a lead role in dealing with that, Madam Speaker.

I know, additionally, the member spoke about access to health care and, clearly, all Manitobans want access to health care. Our government is taking measures to make sure that Manitobans have access to health care. I applaud the ministers of Health for the innovative ways they've taken to make sure that Manitobans have access to health care and, clearly, we want to improve those outcomes for all Manitobans.

We do recognize—Manitobans recognize that change is difficult, but at the end of the day the outcomes will be positive for Manitobans.

I recognize that the members opposite have spent a significant amount of time protesting various things. Now they seem to want to determine what issues people are allowed to protest, where they're allowed to protest, about what and where, Madam Speaker.

I know the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) even admitted that she supports protests, freedom of speech, when she said, and I quote: I've been protesting for 20 years. I've had my children protesting, so I understand the need and the right of individuals to protest for something that they feel is important to them. I get that; I support that. End of quote.

Madam Speaker, those are democratic rights that Manitobans enjoy. We want to make sure that those rights are safeguarded and those restrictions are not in place.

Madam Speaker, the NDP has had 17 years to bring in similar legislation and they hadn't considered that as an option until today, and we're curious why that is a priority today.

Madam Speaker, members seem to think that protests are fine for their supporters, for union bosses, but not for others. Our view is protecting freedom of expression cannot be an ideological issue, and that is not, quite frankly, how our Constitution works.

Madam Speaker, doing away with people's freedoms is something we should be very, very careful not to do. On various issues there are oftentimes many different opinions and many different points of view abound. You cannot take away someone's freedom of speech just because you don't agree with them.

Many people before us have fought hard for the freedoms that Manitobans now enjoy. These freedoms are precious and those freedoms should be safeguarded. Madam Speaker, we will stand up for the

freedom of expression for Manitobans, regardless of whether or not we agree with them.

Thank you for this opportunity, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): I just want to put a couple of words on the record here about the government's disingenuous statements about protecting people's rights.

In this very Chamber, Madam Speaker, they've introduced buffer zones so that people can't protest in the gallery. And yet, now, when it's about women's rights they say, well, no, no, other people's rights will trump that.

Nobody's saying in this bill that protesters don't have the right to protest. It's merely establishing a buffer zone to keep women safe.

If you are a union member going on strike, the first thing companies do is get injunctions to establish buffer zones where you're allowed to picket and where you're not, and this government is constantly in favour of that. So to stand up today and say something different, Madam Speaker, they should all be ashamed.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Madam Speaker, this bill comes down to one word: empathy. Do MLAs have empathy with women and girls who are making difficult health-care decisions?

There are those in Manitoba who have very different points of view with regard to abortions and a variety of other health-care matters. But the fact is that whatever your view on this subject, whatever your views are with respect to abortion or other health matters, that that's not what this bill is about.

* (10:30)

This bill is about one word: empathy. It is about being sensitive to the needs of women who are coming to receive health care and to make and to consult with and to get health care that they need.

This bill is not about suppressing freedom of speech. There are plenty of venues for people to speak out clearly and freely on any subject that they want—in front of the Legislature, for example.

The passing of such legislation in British Columbia and in other provinces has clearly shown that British Columbias are not less free because they have this legislation. People in British Columbia still have plenty of venues that they can speak out and say whatever they like.

You don't see editorials now or recently or for the last number of years talking about the lack of freedom of speech in British Columbia. It is just not the case that this bill is dealing with freedom of speech.

This bill is about empathy. It is about ending attempts to intimidate and shame our fellow human beings. Such intimidation and shame is not helpful and it's not effective; we know that for many and many different venues.

This bill is about empathy. It is about whether members of this Chamber have empathy for their fellow Manitobans or do not have empathy for fellow Manitobans.

The Pallister government wants the freedom for people to intimidate and shame others. This is unfortunate. The Pallister government, in this, as in so many other areas, has shown that it lacks empathy. I think this is very sad. I think this is very unfortunate for Manitobans.

We see this with respect to many who are disadvantaged and who are vulnerable. Even though the Premier (Mr. Pallister) said in the election that one of his top priorities was poverty and addressing it, we are now two and a half years into this government and there's no poverty plan.

There is no empathy in this government for people who are vulnerable, people who are disenfranchised—[interjection]—it is true.

The Pallister government and all MLAs who vote against this bill are demonstrating clearly that they lack empathy for people who are making sensitive and difficult health-care decisions.

Manitoba Liberals will support this legislation and we thank the MLA for St. John for bringing in forward.

Merci, miigwech.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further members in debate? Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 200, The Safe Access to Abortion Services Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Madam Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Speaker: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Speaker: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Recorded Vote

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): A recorded vote, please.

Madam Speaker: A recorded vote having been called, call in the members.

* (11:30)

The question before the House is second reading of Bill 200.

Division

A RECORDED VOTE was taken, the result being as follows:

Yeas

Allum, Altemeyer, Fontaine, Gerrard, Kinew, Lamont, Lamoureux, Lindsey, Maloway, Marcelino (Logan), Smith (Point Douglas).

Nays

Bindle, Clarke, Cox, Cullen, Curry, Eichler, Ewasko, Friesen, Goertzen, Guillemard, Helwer, Isleifson, Johnson, Johnston, Lagassé, Lagimodiere, Martin, Mayer, Michaleski, Micklefield, Morley-Lecomte, Nesbitt, Pedersen, Schuler, Smith (Southdale), Smook, Stefanson, Teitsma, Wharton, Wishart, Wowchuk, Yakimoski.

Deputy Clerk (Mr. Rick Yarish): Yeas 11, Nays 32.

Madam Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 1—Obstetric Delivery Services at Flin Flon General Hospital

Madam Speaker: The hour now being past 11 a.m., and time for private members' resolution.

The resolution before us this morning is the resolution on obstetric delivery services at Flin Flon General Hospital, being brought forward by the honourable member for Flin Flon (Mr. Lindsey).

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of—let me start again—[interjection]—

I move, seconded by the member from Point Douglas, that the following resolution:

WHEREAS the budget for the Northern Regional Health Authority has been slashed by over \$6 million, making it harder for the north to retain doctors; and

WHEREAS the Premier has slashed budgets and cancelled projects for northern communities, making it harder for families to get the primary health care they need; and

WHEREAS with services already stretched thin in the north, the Premier is now forcing families and seniors to travel further for the health care they need; and

WHEREAS on November 6, 2018, the Northern Regional Health Authority announced that obstetric delivery services at the Flin Flon General Hospital would be suspended, with no discussion regarding when they will be reinstated; and

WHEREAS mothers in Flin Flon, and the surrounding area, will now have to travel at least an hour and a half longer to The Pas, creating unnecessary risk for mothers and babies; and

WHEREAS the people of Flin Flon are concerned for the health and safety of mothers-to-be and their babies, including increased physical and financial stress; and

WHEREAS Flin Flon General Hospital is a regional hub that serves several communities on both sides of the Manitoba/Saskatchewan border; and

WHEREAS the hospital in The Pas may not be able to handle the extra workload created by this decision, mainly due to this Provincial Government's refusal to invest in much needed services; and

WHEREAS there has been no commitment from this Provincial Government that mothers, and their escorts, who have to travel to The Pas will be covered by the Northern Patient Transport program; and

WHEREAS the Northern Patient Transport Program has been cut by at least \$1 million and been forced to find another \$450,000 in savings by limiting the number of people who are covered by the program; and

WHEREAS access to quality healthcare is a fundamental right of all Manitobans, no matter where they live.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to take immediate action to restore obstetric delivery services at Flin Flon General Hospital and work with the government of Saskatchewan and the federal government to ensure that obstetric services continue to be available for the region.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lindsey: It doesn't bring me great joy to rise in this House today to urge this government to do the right thing and ensure that women in Flin Flon and the entire surrounding area can actually give birth in a hospital that has been allowing births to take place since 1938, I think it was.

This government, through successive budgetary restraints, even though they claim differently, has made it harder and harder to attract the right kind of talent to the North in particular.

The way they came about this decision, announcing and giving women not nearly enough time, giving families not nearly enough time to actually make alternative arrangements—not once have we heard, for sure, definitively, if people in Flin Flon will be afforded northern patient transportation coverage to spend two weeks or more in The Pas. We haven't heard that because, I suspect, that's not this government's intention.

They talk about safety, but what they're not taking into account is travel distances in the North in particular, at the same time they're looking at reducing budgets for things like snowplowing, which will make it harder for women to get to The Pas.

* (11:40)

I've listened to the Minister of Health stand up in this Chamber and say that women should be entitled, Manitobans should be entitled, to decent health care close to where they live.

Unfortunately, his actions and this government's actions are completely contrary to that statement that he's made in this House.

Now, he's said that, well, people from the Flin Flon area will be able to go to The Pas. Unfortunately, we're not sure that The Pas has the room to handle more bursts, so we're not sure that that's a viable option, and this government has not been able to answer that question.

We know that the Flin Flon General Hospital serves a much broader audience than just Flin Flon, Manitoba. We know that there's a lot of births that come from the Saskatchewan side because, as many members in this Chamber probably don't realize because it's outside the Perimeter, Flin Flon is a border town. And it represents communities not just on this Manitoba side—communities such as Creighton, Saskatchewan; Denare Beach, Saskatchewan; Pelican Narrows; Deschambault.

So the question then becomes, where will those women and families go to give birth? And while somebody has said, well, they should be all right to go to The Pas, we don't know that. We also know that they don't have family and friends there that they can stay with, whereas in the Creighton, Denare Beach area, we know that people from those other outlying communities do have family and friends that they can stay at.

So we're left to believe that a lot of these families from some of the outlying First Nations communities, as well as Creighton, Denare Beach, may be forced to go to Prince Albert, which is four-plus hours away.

Now, a recent article in the Prince Albert news was that they're already overloaded at their hospital, that they have facilities to handle four babies, and presently there's at least nine currently there. So I'm not sure what happens to the additional births that are expected, potentially, to take place there, which is why the resolution is that this government actually quits fighting with other governments, sits down and figures out how to make Saskatchewan government a part of the solution to this.

They need to sit down with the federal government, who has a role to play when it comes particularly to First Nations health, and figure out what it means to properly fund a regional health centre that will allow mothers and families the option that they've had for so many years: to give birth at the Flin Flon General Hospital.

To the best of our knowledge, those negotiations, those conversations—if they have started—have started very recently, and certainly not before this announcement was made, which gave women so little time to all of a sudden figure out how they were going to make alternative arrangements, how they were going to afford to pay for those alternative arrangements, how the father would now be forced to take time off work if the mother-to-be lands up going to The Pas for an extended period of time.

This government talks about it being a safety issue. It's a self-engineered safety 'inju'—issue on their part because they haven't properly funded the Northern Health Region so that they can have the best equipment which will help attract doctors to the region.

And, while the minister says heroic efforts have been made to attract an obstetrician and while the CEO of the Northern Health Region was quoted in last Wednesday edition of the Flin Flon Reminder saying efforts to attract and hire obstetricians for Flin Flon continue, if you search on the website, that shows they're trying to hire an obstetrician in Thompson, but there's absolutely no advertisement there for an obstetrician at Flin Flon General Hospital. So, apparently, we're expected to believe something that isn't, perhaps, factual.

Women in Flin Flon and the surrounding area deserve better from this government. They deserve to be able to give birth close to where they live. Women in the entire region that is serviced by the Flin Flon General Hospital deserve to be able to give birth as close to home as possible.

They need to know that their governments are working together to make sure that those services are available at the Flin Flon General Hospital. As far as we know, those conversations have not happened, Madam Speaker.

We've got multiple letters that people have signed and will be delivering to the Premier (Mr. Pallister). Petitions have been signed by hundreds and hundreds of concerned citizens.

Part of the problem with those petitions, of course, Madam Speaker, is this Legislative Assembly doesn't recognize either that Flin Flon is a border town, and many people who've signed those petitions come from the Saskatchewan side, because life in Flin Flon, Crayton, Denare Beach, doesn't recognize that border. It's only these institutions that recognize that border, and something needs to change with that as well.

For now, this government needs to treat women in Flin Flon and surrounding area with the respect that they deserve. Get obstetric services back in Flin Flon General Hospital now, not someday down the road. Women in the North deserve respect.

They deserve to be treated—not equally, because that would be expecting too much from this government, but at least equitably, so that services can be available closer to home.

So, again, we urge this government to do the right thing, to do the right thing for women in Flin Flon and surrounding area, to sit down with the other two levels of government and come up with the answer now to get birth services back in Flin Flon General Hospital. Thank you.

Questions

Madam Speaker: A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions may be addressed in the following sequence: the first question may be asked by a member from another party. Any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties. Each independent member may ask one question, and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Questions?

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): Service gaps have been occurring at Flin Flon General Hospital for years. Can the member opposite explain why they did not absolutely nothing while in government to fix the problem, and continued to expose patients in Flin Flon to risk by allowing them to deliver with no OB/GYN present?

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): You know, we on this side, as well as the people of Manitoba, are really getting tired of this government's continued excuse. They've been in power now for two years. Services continue to be degraded—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —by this government.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: When the NDP was in power, you could give birth in Flin Flon General Hospital. Now, in two years only since this government has been to power, you cannot do that anymore, Madam Speaker.

So perhaps they need to get over their story about 17 years, and tell us what they're going to do today to restore birth services at Flin Flon General Hospital.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): When the MLA for St. Boniface and I were in Flin Flon and Snow Lake and Thompson, The Pas last year, there seemed to be a fairly general problem of recruitment—physicians in the North.

* (11:50)

I wonder if the MLA for Flin Flon would speak to that as part of this shortage of obstetricians in Flin Flon.

Mr. Lindsey: And that's an excellent question. There has been a problem attracting medical professionals to the North, in particular because resources continue to get tighter and smaller while we should be looking at what new equipment we can install at the Flin Flon General Hospital which will help attract new, young doctors that want to be involved with the cutting-edge materials, that want to be a part of the North.

Instead, this government is continually shrinking those resources, and that is part of the problem.

Mr. Greg Nesbitt (Riding Mountain): As a resident of the constituency I represent, for the last 50 years, I saw obstetric delivery services closed—not paused—in Shoal Lake, Minnedosa and Russell under NDP governments.

Why does this member think he's in a position now to be giving our government advice on health care?

Mr. Lindsey: And I appreciate the question from the member opposite, and I have great respect for his opinion.

If one community loses its obstetric services, does that mean the rest should? If one member jumps off a cliff does that mean everybody should? I think not, Madam Speaker.

So, when we look at—[interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —when we look at the areas serviced, to expect women from the surrounding area, not just Flin Flon, to travel two and a half hours, four and a half hours, on a good day, is the wrong answer, and I expect better from the government of Manitoba.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): And I want to thank the member for bringing forward this private member's resolution, for actually listening to the people of Flin Flon and, you know, forcing this government to actually look at the detriment that they're going to be putting onto women in Flin Flon.

You know, as a mother myself and, you know, I'm speaking to the mothers across the way, babies come whenever. We don't plan when babies are going to come. Who knows if they have an hour to travel to The Pas?

So will the member stand up and tell us about the dangers that these women are risking in order to give birth?

Mr. Lindsey: And thank you for the question. Certainly, when the government stands up and talks

about safety, that's not really what they're talking about, because expecting mothers to travel greater and greater and greater distances without the resources to be able to have their family present when they're giving birth, while this government cuts things like northern patient transportation programs that might have helped women in the North get to those services, the continued cuts that we see from this government, particularly with health care in the Northern Health Region, is putting patients at greater risk, not less.

Mr. Gerrard: I want to follow up again. When the MLA for St. Boniface and I were in Flin Flon and Snow Lake and Thompson, we ran into a situation in Snow Lake where they have had a physician for many, many years and the treatment of the physician by this government and the people working for this government in—seems to have led to the loss of that physician in Snow Lake. It seems to be a pattern of what I might call northern neglect, which is rather disturbing.

I wonder if the member would speak to this.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the member from River Heights for that question, and certainly he highlights a problem that we've seen in the Northern Health Region growing and growing, and that seems to be some sort of insidious, behind-the-scenes effort to discourage doctors, nurses, from staying and practising.

We've heard any number of times from people that their doctors have told them they wanted to stay in Flin Flon, but they were discouraged from it.

Now none of those health-care professionals want to come forward and risk any chance of their future career because of what they're afraid of in Flin Flon.

Mrs. Sarah Guillemard (Fort Richmond): The federal government is only funding 19 per cent of health care in Manitoba.

Will the member commit to calling on the federal government to make a more significant contribution to Manitobans' health care and act as a full partner in health care?

Mr. Lindsey: I look forward to the member from Fort Richmond voting in favour of this resolution, because, in fact, what it does is ask her government, this government, to work with the federal government to make sure there's adequate funding for obstetric services—*[interjection]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lindsey: —in Flin Flon, to work with the Saskatchewan government, to work with themselves, to make sure that the funding is there to make sure that the services are there that people in the North depend on. So I look forward to her voting in favour of this resolution.

Mrs. Smith: We know that babies are sometimes born under distress. We know that there is problems in pregnancy that women experience. We know that the northern patient transportation has been cut. These women have to travel. As men across the way, I'm sure these men have been in these rooms with their wives, with their partners, and seen their child being born.

This is forcing women to leave their communities. It's forcing women to leave their families behind, their support, and often these are the people who are there to support when a child is in distress.

So I ask the member, what kind of effect is this going to have on the family?

Mr. Lindsey: I thank the member from Point Douglas for the question.

Any time there's an imminent birth in a family, there's a certain amount of stress involved with that. When all of a sudden people find out at the last minute that they can't give birth anymore in their home community, that stress level just skyrocketed.

Increasing that stress level can cause irreparable harm to the baby and to the mother. Mothers shouldn't have to worry that their birth certificates will now say: born on the side of No. 10 highway.

So this government again needs to step up, get with all the other governments and fix the problem.

Mr. Gerrard: Madam Speaker, one follow-up question.

I can't remember seeing any ads for any real, forceful activity to recruit obstetricians to Flin Flon and to make sure that people who would be interested in going know that this is a phenomenal community to practice obstetrics.

Why haven't there been such a campaign?

Mr. Lindsey: Well, that's an excellent question, and it certainly flies in the face of what the Minister of Health said about the heroic efforts that they made to attract obstetricians, because as near as we can tell, there's been zero effort, because there are no ads out there looking to hire an obstetrician in Flin Flon.

So has there been an effort? Not that we've seen. What we've seen is the Northern Health Region and this government trying to shrink the services that are available, which then makes it that much harder to attract doctors to the Northern Health Region, to Flin Flon General in specific. We need to grow that; we need to encourage doctors to come north.

Madam Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: The debate is open.

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): I'm honoured to speak to the member from Flin Flon's private member resolution, Obstetric Delivery Services at Flin Flon General Hospital.

I want to first begin by stating keeping Manitobans safe is this government's top priority. This is apparent in all areas, and today, we discuss its importance with respect to the medical field.

Family is very important, and ensuring family members are safe and provided for with the necessary medical services is a priority.

Few things in life are replaceable, and human life—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have nine minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 p.m., this House is recessed and stands recessed until 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, December 6, 2018

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