

STAFFING LEVELS IN SENIORS CARE FACILITIES

J. Horgan: Over the past two days, the Minister of Health has struggled to come to terms with his attitude towards seniors in this province. When the revolving-door approach to care home operators struck again at Wexford Creek, the second revolving door in two years, the minister said: "Don't worry. It'll be fine. Unfortunately, at that time, the minister neglected to tell us in this House that Wexford Creek is one of 232 publicly funded care homes that the seniors advocate says do not meet the government's own staffing guidelines. Eighty percent of the government-funded care homes are understaffed, and seniors are paying the price.

Governing is about choices. My question to the Premier of British Columbia is: can she tell this House why she believes it's okay that 80 percent of the seniors in care are not getting the care that even the government's levels prescribe?

Hon. C. Clark: As of September 2015 in B.C., we have almost 32,000 publicly subsidized residential family care home beds, assisted living and group home care beds. That's a 26 percent increase of over 6,500 beds. That's been the result of historic investments, record investments that our government has made over the years in one of the most durable, best health care systems you'll find anywhere in the world.

In British Columbia, we have the best health care outcomes in Canada. That is because we work hard to spend money wisely. It's because we work hard to set priorities and stick to our plans. It's because our staff in health care centres across the province work so incredibly hard with such ethical dedication. And it's because of other innovations best health care outcomes in Canada. That is because we work hard to spend money wisely. It's because we work hard to set priorities and stick to our plans. It's because our staff in health care centres across the province work so incredibly hard, with such ethical dedication. And it's because of other innovations like, for example, bringing in the country's first and only seniors advocate.

This is a challenge all over the world — making sure that as that population of senior citizens grows and as the acuteness of that population's needs grow, we keep up with it. The Minister of Health is making sure we do everything we can, with a plan for seniors, listening and responding to the seniors advocate, which he had the pleasure of bringing to life.

We are making sure that we continue to make those investments because we hope senior citizens in British Columbia will be able to live the longest, healthiest, most fulfilling lives of any senior citizens in Canada.

Madame Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition on a supplemental.

J. Horgan: The government's choice to make an investment in this budget and the last budget was \$236 million in tax breaks for the top 2 percent of wage earners. That was the choice you made last year.

What do care facilities do when they lack staff? They prescribe more drugs. At Wexford Creek, 28 percent of the residents there are taking anti-psychotics even though they've not been

diagnosed. Worse still, nearly two-thirds of the residents are taking anti-depressants, when only one-third of the residents there have been diagnosed. This goes on in care home after care home after care home.

Can the Premier tell this House if she is truly honouring seniors and actually advocating and living up to the commitments that the seniors advocate is making when she's cutting resources for care homes and forcing them to overprescribe to our seniors?

Hon. C. Clark: Only a New Democrat would call a \$3.2 billion dollar increase in health care over the next three years a cut. That is classic NDP math. The member is right that government is about choices. And the choices on this side of the House that we've made are very clear and starkly different from the choices that that member would make.

We understand that in order to be able to make those historic increases of almost 50 cents on every dollar citizens send us, to make sure we have the best health care system in the country, we need to have revenue to government growing. Now, there are two ways you can grow revenue to government. One of them is to raise taxes, which is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition advocates every day. The other is to grow the economy.

That's why when he says no to the Port Mann Bridge, when he says no to building the Coquihalla Highway, when he says no to all of the changes that we've made, when he says no to the South Fraser Perimeter Road, when he says no to Site C, when he says no to LNG, when he says no to the McKenzie Interchange, what he's saying no to is jobs. And he's saying no to growing the economy. We understand that we need to grow the economy if we want to look after people. We are looking after people and making those investments so that the senior citizens of British Columbia can have the best lives of any senior citizens in the country.

Madame Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition on a supplemental.

J. Horgan: Well, I think that evidence.... For those who've just arrived here for the first time, the only party that said no today was that party over there when we said: "Let's get big money out of politics." When it comes to growing the coffers at B.C. Liberal HQ, steady as she goes....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members, this House will come to order.

Please continue.

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Minister.

Please continue.

J. Horgan: All politics is local. I know that the Premier sometimes visits Kelowna. So I'll let her know that in her own constituency, the David Lloyd Jones facility, Lakeview Lodge and Three Links Manor are all underfunded according to the standards set by this government.

The seniors advocate has raised very serious concerns about the way that the B.C. Liberals are managing seniors' care in this province, and the Premier's response is to talk about the Coquihalla Highway. Absolutely extraordinary. I would like, if at all possible, through you, Hon. Speaker, to see if the Premier could alight down here on planet Earth and talk to the people of British Columbia directly, right now, about serious concerns about the way that the B.C. Liberals are managing seniors care in this province, and the Premier's response is to talk about the Coquihalla Highway — absolutely extraordinary.

I would like, if at all possible, to see if the Premier could alight down here on planet Earth and talk to the people of British Columbia directly, right now, about seniors care. What are you going to do to make it better?

Hon. C. Clark: I always get the feeling that the Leader of the Opposition gets a little bit antsy when we start to talk about the economy in this chamber. Here we were today talking about Site C, for example, which the member has opposed. We've been talking about LNG, which would create 100,000 jobs.

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members. Nelson-Creston. Vancouver–Point Grey.

Please continue.

Hon. C. Clark: No to Site C. No to LNG. And he talks about saying no.

Here we are in this Legislature voting openly, making our views known on the issues. Meanwhile, this Leader of the Opposition sends a secret letter to the federal government to outline his....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members. Members, this House will come to order.

Hon. C. Clark: He sends a letter — he won't put it out publicly; he won't talk about it publicly — to the federal government telling them that he wants to put a stop to LNG, to put a stop to the 100,000 jobs that that would offer to the people of this province. Rather than deciding to build this province, that member doesn't have the courage to stand up and say yes. He doesn't have the courage to stand up for the things he used to say he believed in. Instead, what does he do? He runs and hides.

He opposes economic development all across British Columbia. He says: "It is clear to us that for the purposes of the CEAA review, the Pacific NorthWest LNG proposal before you does not

meet the condition of concern.... Until and unless these deficiencies are addressed, we urge you to withhold final recommendation for approval."

If this House needed any proof that that member does not stand up for yes, does not stand up for jobs and does not stand up for working people, all they need to do is go dig their way through the CEAA website and find out what this member really stands for.

J. Darcy: Let's talk for a minute about building this province. It is those seniors in care who built this province and who sacrificed. They deserve dignity and respect from this government and not a Premier who says no to improving seniors care for the most vulnerable in this province.

Yesterday the Minister of Health tried to justify, as the Premier is, why 80 percent of care homes in B.C. don't have enough staff to provide the most basic level of care, including, often, one bath a week. The Minister of Health said: "Seniors are not widgets. They need individualized care plans." Lofty words yesterday but very far from the reality that faces most seniors in many care homes in B.C.

Why isn't the Premier asking the question? Why are so many seniors in care on antipsychotics? The answer is that when many seniors with dementia are disruptive or aggressive and there aren't enough staff to care for them, too often they are sedated instead. It's called chemical restraint, and it's an inhumane way to treat our seniors.

My question, again, is and there aren't enough staff to care for them, too often they are sedated instead. It's called chemical restraint, and it's an inhumane way to treat our seniors.

My question again is to the Premier. Seniors deserve to be dealt with and treated with dignity and with respect. Will she commit today to say yes to increasing staffing levels in care homes so that vulnerable seniors are not drugged in order to restrain them?

Hon. C. Clark: We absolutely need to make sure that the care homes and the places where seniors are looked after are up to the highest possible standard. That is one of the reasons that we've added \$3.2 billion to the health care budget over the next three years. That's one of the reasons that the Minister of Health has been working so hard to make sure that a health care plan for seniors is implemented and executed according to plan in our province. That's one of the reasons that we've appointed a seniors advocate, the first one — the only one in Canada — who can make sure that we're on top of these issues.

The member is right. Seniors did build this province, and we owe seniors a lot. Seniors built the hydro infrastructure that we depend on today. They built the mines and the forestry infrastructure. They built the communities that we all live in and that we all depend on. We owe senior citizens a lot.

One of the things we owe them is the best health care in the world. And another thing we owe them is to make sure that we don't fritter away their economic legacy, that we build on what they left us rather than tearing it down, that we make sure the future that they know — the future for

their kids and their grandkids and the kids who come after them — is one that they can be just as proud of as the one that they left for us.

Madame Speaker: The member for New Westminster on a supplemental.

J. Darcy: Let's really talk about our parents and our grandparents and our loved ones in care. When they move into residential care it becomes their home.

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members.

Please continue.

J. Darcy: When our vulnerable seniors move into residential care, it becomes their home — their last home — and the staff who care for them provide for their most intimate care needs day in and day out. They also share their laughter and their pain. They share their joy, and they share their tears. And it is often the care staff who are with them at the end of their lives, and they want nothing more than to be able to sit with them and hold their hands and comfort them in their moment of loneliness and fear. Yet even when residents are dying, they still only have the 20 minutes of care...

Madame Speaker: Please pose your question.

J. Darcy: ...to help put people to bed. That is wrong, hon. Speaker. It is terribly wrong.

When will this Premier finally take action and give our seniors in care the dignified care that they deserve?

Hon. C. Clark: I think that senior citizens — whether or not they are in care in this province — and their families deserve better than what we've heard from that member of the opposition today. Because what she's saying is just not accurate.

For those of us who have lived with a family member living with dementia, for example, who have worked hard to find them care, who have given a good portion of our lives to make sure that they are looked after and loved, we understand how vulnerable people are when they're in that position — the senior citizens, themselves, and all of the people around them who are trying to provide them with that support.

So it's really important that all of those people, all of whom are in a time of crisis and who are vulnerable, have the right information — not information the member makes up on the spot because the theatre of question period is convenient for her. They deserve better than that.

Our Minister of Health and our government is dedicating \$3.2 billion over the next three years for our health care system. A large portion of that goes to make sure that seniors get the care that they need. We do need to do more. That's why we have a plan for hospice and palliative care.

That's why we have a plan for seniors care and our Minister of Health, and our government, is dedicating \$3.2 billion over the next three years for our health care system. A large portion of that goes to make sure that seniors get the care that they need.

We do need to do more. That's why we have a plan for hospice and palliative care. That's why we have a plan for seniors care and are working on a plan for dementia care. That's why we have a seniors advocate, so that people can get the right information and have the right supports.

For those of us like me who have lived through this, the worst thing in the world is to be the recipient of the kind of inaccurate information that the member is talking about today. People need facts. They need to know where the opportunities are for them to find care for the people that they love. They deserve better than what that member has offered today.

The Minister of Health, I have absolute confidence, is going to make sure we do absolutely the best that we can to make sure that this is the best place in Canada for seniors to live out their lives.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON SERIOUS INCIDENTS IN SENIORS CARE FACILITIES

S. Robinson: Perhaps we need to remind the Premier that everything that is being said on this side of the House comes from her own seniors advocate report. Everything.

On Monday, the Minister of Health said....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members. Members, the Chair will hear the question.

Please continue.

S. Robinson: On Monday, the Minister of Health said in this House that the seniors advocate was doing great work.

Today, just two days later, we learn that the advocate can't even get the information she needs to do her work. Vancouver Coastal Health has decided not to provide the seniors advocate with information about serious infractions in government care facilities. The seniors advocate believes it's important that families know about serious incidents involving residents living in government care facilities when they consider where to put their loved one.

Can the minister explain why his staff is withholding important information on serious incidents from the advocate and, ultimately, the families who have to make this most difficult decision?

Hon. T. Lake: Seniors in our province did build this province, which is why it's so ironic to hear from members opposite, who are absolutely opposed to building this province. Every time there's an opportunity to build this province, to grow the economy, to support social programs, they say no.

The seniors advocate provides great information. This website that the office of the seniors advocate has created was a result of the Ombudsperson's report, a recommendation that came to life in this website. We act on recommendations of the seniors advocate, as the members are aware, with legislation before us this session on assisted living.

We take the recommendations of the seniors advocate seriously. We will continue to do that and, as the Premier said, continue to build this province and continue to reward the people that went before us and ensure they have the very best seniors care in all of Canada.

Madame Speaker: Coquitlam-Maillardville on a supplemental.

S. Robinson: Well, not only have staff at Vancouver Coastal Health decided not to provide the seniors advocate with information about serious infractions in their care facilities, but they are also telling families not to pay too much attention to the advocate's report when deciding how to choose a place for their loved one to live and to be cared for.

Can the minister tell this House why his staff is keeping this information about serious incidents in care home from the advocate, from British Columbians? What's this minister hiding?

Hon. T. Lake: The members opposite represent a party that between 1994 and 1999 saw the number of public long-term beds fall by 18 percent, and the number of patients receiving home support fell by 19 percent. That's the shameful record of the members opposite.

Since 2001, 32,000 beds in the province of British Columbia....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members. On both sides.

Please continue.

Hon. T. Lake: Today, with the number of additions — 7,400 new, publicly subsidized residential care assisted-living group home beds — we don't have lineups at MLA constituency offices anymore of people begging MLAs to find a placement for their parents. We have created system of care that makes sure that seniors are well looked after, and we will continue to work with the seniors advocate and with our Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors to ensure that we lead the country in looking begging MLAs to find a placement for their parents, and we have created a system of care that makes sure that seniors are well looked after. We will continue to work with the seniors advocate and with our Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors to ensure that we lead the country in looking after seniors.