

Question Period – Thursday, April 7, 2016

FUNDING FOR SENIORS CARE FACILITIES

J. Horgan: Yesterday we raised a series of questions in this House about the care of seniors in our province. The response from the minister and the response from the Premier was to recite statistics that were convenient for the government, not convenient for the realities of seniors in 2016.

The seniors advocate, who the Premier took great plaudits for appointing — for herself, in any event — has issued a report that says that 82 percent of the publicly funded facilities in British Columbia are not meeting the basic hours-of-care guidelines that this government created. That strikes me as the only significant statistic that we should talk about in this House today.

My question is to the Premier. Does she believe that the data that has been provided by the seniors advocate appointed by this government that demonstrates 82 percent of facilities in this province that are publicly funded are not meeting basic guidelines — is that acceptable to her and her government?

Hon. T. Lake: As Health Minister, it's particularly significant to rise on World Health Day today and to be reminded by the Conference Board of Canada on social media this morning that the health outcomes in British Columbia are No. 1 in Canada. The health outcomes in British Columbia are No. 3 among OECD jurisdictions.

It is also a great pleasure to stand up when we have 42,000 nurses around the province currently considering a tentative agreement with this government — an agreement that allows them to share in the economic prosperity of this province. The growth in the economic prosperity of this province — something that the members opposite would deny to not only the 42,000 nurses around the province, to all 300,000 government employees.

When they say no to Site C, when they say no to LNG, when they say no to the growth of the economy of British Columbia, we are going to grow the economy in British Columbia so we can continue to provide the number one health care service in all of Canada.

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

J. Horgan: Again, you've got to give full marks to a government that can say growing the economy is going to make people less concerned about their mom and dad who are in a care home not getting adequate services and being over-prescribed drugs so they're not a problem.

What's the response of the B.C. Liberal government to the report by their own seniors advocate? It's for the minister to stand up and say what has been happening in British Columbia for decades. It wasn't just the B.C. Liberals that discovered health care is important to people. It's been happening since the 1980s, in the 1990s, at the turn of the century and right up to today.

The issue that we've raised in this House all week long, and it's just so by their own seniors advocate.

It's for the minister to stand up and say what has been happening in British Columbia for decades. It wasn't just the B.C. Liberals that discovered health care is important to people. It's been happening since the 1980s, in the 1990s, at the turn of the century and right up to today.

The issue that we've raised in this House all week long.... It's just so laughable to the Premier. It's so funny to the Premier.

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members. Members.

J. Horgan: The challenge we have is a complete detachment from reality. People on this side of the House, on that side of the House....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: We're not proceeding, Members, and the clock will continue to run.

Please continue.

J. Horgan: My question is to the Premier. Lakeview Lodge in her constituency, David Lloyd Jones in her constituency, Three Links Manor in her constituency — not in Vancouver-Fairview, but in Kelowna — are on the list of those that not getting the funding they need to provide the resources that our seniors deserve.

Before we hear again from the Minister of Health about how grand it is, let's talk about the people that are desperate for better services in British Columbia. They look to their Premier for leadership on the question. Will you take the advice of your seniors advocate and adequately fund these facilities so that minimum standards can be met, yes or no?

Madame Speaker: Through the Chair.

Hon. T. Lake: The first seniors advocate in all of Canada provides us with great recommendations, and we follow many of her recommendations, which is evidenced by legislation before this House. The seniors advocate said we should make assisted living more flexible. Legislation before this house considers that option.

I want to correct the record today. The member for Coquitlam-Maillardville yesterday claimed that Vancouver Coastal was not providing information to the office of the seniors advocate around this issue. That is absolutely false. The seniors advocate says that Vancouver Coastal has been nothing but cooperative, as we assemble information that helps people in the province of British Columbia find spaces for their loved ones.

We will continue to work with the office of the seniors advocate and our parliamentary secretary to continue what we have been doing since 2001 — and putting more resources, making more spaces available, for the great seniors who built this province.

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

J. Horgan: Well, the seniors advocate was on radio yesterday, and she was asked a direct question: "What's behind this insufficient staffing?" Her response was: "It's the funding." The question came again: "Are you sure?" And she said: "It's the funding."

What she also said, through you to the minister or the member for Kelowna — west side — was that we're not meeting basic standards, and there are no consequences. Her recommendation to

government is to institute a law that makes minimum standards absolutely imperative and then have consequences if they're not met.

My question to that guy or her over there: will you bring in law to have consequences for not meeting the needs of seniors in British Columbia?

Hon. T. Lake: We honour our senior citizens with the investments we make. We respect our senior citizens, unlike the member who has no respect for this House or the members in it.

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Just wait.

We will now proceed. Please continue.

Hon. T. Lake: The seniors advocate does important work. My parliamentary secretary will be working with the seniors advocate, with the ministry, with health authorities to address the question of care hours, but the reality is that when that member was chief of staff in the government, the number of public long-term beds fell by 18 percent. The number of patients receiving home support fell by 19 percent.

People were waiting two years to find a place for their loved one. Now, in most cases, it's under 90 days to be placed into residential care. We have made record investments. We have the best health care system for all British Columbians, and we'll continue to make those investments. And we will grow the economy despite the opposition and their declarations against everything that grows the economy in British Columbia.

S. Robinson: Well, yesterday the Minister of Health said in this House that he takes the seniors advocate's recommendations seriously. Twelve months ago, the seniors advocate released a report — Placement, Drugs and therapy: We Can Do Better.

MEDICATION OF SENIORS IN CARE FACILITIES AND RESPITE SERVICES FOR CAREGIVERS

S. Robinson: Well, yesterday the Minister of Health said in this House that he takes the seniors advocate's recommendations seriously. Twelve months ago, the seniors advocate released a report, Placement, Drugs and Therapy: We Can Do Better. The report documents findings of a high-level review of health assessment records of B.C.'s 25,000 seniors in residential care and 29,000 seniors receiving home care.

She noted that while 47 percent of residential care clients are being prescribed antidepressant medication, only 24 percent of these clients have actually been diagnosed with depression. So this data released a year ago — a year ago — tells us that we are continuing to drug our seniors unnecessarily.

Can the minister tell us why he's continuing to fail these seniors?

Hon. T. Lake: I note that the member didn't take the opportunity to correct the record from her missed statements yesterday in terms of the cooperation that all health authorities have had with the seniors advocate. The reality is that this has been recognized across Canada. But I would say that every one of those prescriptions is prescribed by a physician, not a critic who doesn't know the information from

which she reads, doesn't take the opportunity to do research to make sure that the information she has is correct.

We recognize, and we are working with the doctors of B.C. We are working with care providers and health authorities, with the B.C. Patient Safety Quality Council to ensure that we have appropriate prescription and dispensing of medications to seniors, and we have programs that are working to reduce the unnecessary medication in residential care homes.

Madame Speaker: Coquitlam-Maillardville on a supplemental.

S. Robinson: I think it's important to recognize that this minister knows full well that the reason for overmedicating seniors is that there are not enough hands to support these frail and elderly seniors. They need more people, and this government isn't providing them.

This past September, over six months ago, the seniors advocate released a report called Caregivers in Distress: More Respite Needed. In that report, the advocate notes that 29 percent of caregivers are in distress — one of the highest reported in this country. She goes on to note that "services such as home support have not kept pace with the increase in the seniors population."

If the minister really takes the advocate's recommendation seriously, can he tell us why this government has provided almost \$1 billion in tax relief to the province's wealthiest, while our seniors and their caregivers, the people who have built this province, have to continue to suffer?

Hon. T. Lake: Maybe the member should look to her left and ask her colleague why his chief of staff cut residential care spaces, cut home services.

Everyone has seen the wave of demographics coming at us. That is why we created the office of the seniors advocate. That is why we work with health authorities and the office of the seniors advocate.

We have made record investments in residential care, in assisted living, in group homes around the province. The members opposite know that. They know what the situation was like in the 1990s. They know how much better it is today. We will continue to improve services for seniors who have built the province of British Columbia.