

Late Debate – Emergency Room Closures

October 29, 2009

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

MS. VICKI CONRAD: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in my place to speak to this very important resolution on emergency department closures all across this province.

I'm pleased to stand here and also give kudos to our Health Minister on this side of the House who has been working for the past four to five months on ensuring that the problems faced by ERs across this province will, indeed, have some resolution over the next couple of years.

We all recognize, on this side of the House, that this has been a longstanding problem in our ERs. It just hasn't happened overnight. These problems with ER closures, within our health care system here in the province, they have been long-standing problems and certainly have been developing over the past decade or more.

We know on this side of the House that it will take time to address these problems, and we have started. Our Minister of Health on this side of the House has wasted no time in putting together plans and finding solutions to keeping ERs open and keeping our commitment as government. The previous government only acted on this problem - a decades-old or more problem – of ER closures, only on the eve of an election in the minister's backyard. We committed and will continue to commit to addressing these problems for all Nova Scotians, and from a system perspective and not political one-offs.

Presently our minister is working and taking action as we committed to during the election. Dr. Ross is already on the job,

Mr. Speaker. He is aware of the challenges in the Capital District Health Authority, and he has met with the deputy minister already on potential in-term and short-term actions to relieve the pressures of our ERs across this province. New beds have been added. Dr. Ross also has a work plan which will see him visiting facilities and staff in DHAs across the province and reporting back his advice to the deputy minister.

This will inform future short-term actions. DHAs have been told they have more flexibility in their funding arrangements to find locums, but we know on this side of the House - and our Minister of Health is very much aware - that chronic and systematic problems this long in the making won't be addressed overnight, and certainly not within a few short months of governing on this side of the House. We need to be realistic. We need to look at the fact that these problems in ERs, again, are decades old. They cannot be solved in a few short months. There are a lot of issues that have resulted over the years in terms of ER closures and it's just not finding that simple one cure-all solution.

Unlike the Opposition, we will not tell Nova Scotians that there is a magic wand to solve these problems. There is no magic wand. What we told Nova Scotians in the election - and now - is the truth. It is a big, complex, longstanding problem that has been neglected for far too long, but we also told Nova Scotians that we had a plan, and that's what we are implementing, and that's what our Minister of Health has been working on for the past four to five months since we have taken this side of the House.

It began with Dr. Ross. Yesterday the minister introduced a bill - Bill No. 52 - which was passed today in this House that would strengthen the reporting and accountability relationships, Mr. Speaker, and that's a good thing. That is a responsible move to a longstanding problem that will help to start finding resolution to ER closures in this province. In and of itself, it won't fix the

problem - we realize that, and the minister realizes that it alone will not fix the problem to ER closures in this province, but it is an important piece of the complex puzzle of ER closures. We said as a government that we would be accountable to Nova Scotians. This will help do that, and that's what we committed to in the election.

In the coming months we will implement additional measures including recommended actions by Dr. Ross, but also additional beds where needed and an emergency department protection fund, and that is another responsible action and responsible solution to a possible resolution to ER closures across this province. We also know that addressing this problem requires doctors and nurses, and actions like this will help recruit and retain those good doctors and nurses for this province.

Our Minister of Health has been giving due diligence to the problems of ER closures in this province. Our minister is committed to finding the most reasonable and the most responsible solutions that in the end, and over the next few years, will certainly see positive results to some of the crises we see in emergency departments all across this province.

We shall not forget that these are just not overnight solutions that are going to help solve this crisis; this is about good planning, good governance, accountability by this government and by this Minister of Health for this government. We will ensure that we are accountable to the people of Nova Scotia and the commitments this government made during that election.

We will commit to working with all stakeholders in finding these solutions. I admire and feel quite confident in our Minister of Health, in this government, who has been acting as quickly as possible given the few short months that we have been on this side of the House, to move forward with positive action on a long-standing crisis in this province over the past decade or more. I feel

quite confident, standing in my place on behalf of this government and discussing this very important issue, that we, as representatives on this side of the House, and I know all members of this House, are very concerned about the growing problems within our health care system.

I can tell you, this government and this Minister of Health, our Minister of Health, are committed to finding those resolutions to the problems we are faced with in health care today. One of them, and a very important one of them, the one we're debating here tonight, is the problem of ER closures all across this province. Each and every one of our communities that have a hospital that has faced closures - we know the impact that it has on our community members. We know the difficulty that it is for staff and doctors to manage those closures, to not be able to deliver the care in their communities that they have trained for, that they are committed to providing that good health care.

We also know, Mr. Speaker, that this government and this Minister of Health on this side of the House has been working diligently at finding those solutions. I trust that the members on the other side of the House, given time, will recognize that this government is committed, that this government has been working diligently, and that they'll also recognize that this is just not an easy crisis to fix. It can't be fixed in four months, and they know that, we know that. So obviously the good members on the other side of the House also recognize that these long-standing problems of closures in our communities across this province cannot possibly be fixed in a few short months.

So we, on this side of the House, have trust and faith in our government, in our Minister of Health, giving good accountability and coming up with productive solutions - that eventually, over the next couple of years, we will see some positive results in the crisis that we are facing today in our emergency rooms. Thank you, Mr.

Speaker, for allowing me to debate this serious topic.

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