

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 571-19(2): NATIONAL PHARMACARE

February 23, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. First, let's establish the position of this government. Does this Cabinet support a national pharmacare program? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Mr. Speaker, yes.

MR. O'REILLY: While I am on a roll, does this government support the creation of a national program as envisaged on the federal Bill C-213, the Canada Pharmacare Act, and has that position been communicated to our Member of Parliament?

HON. JULIE GREEN: This legislation, if it does, in fact, pass through the House of Commons this week, represents a real game-changer toward prescription medications for people in the NWT. Only about 50 percent of our population has pharmacy and medication coverage, so this would take in a lot of people who are currently left out. However, there is a lot of fine print that needs to be negotiated between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments. Obviously, pharmacare would be a national initiative but implemented by provinces and territories, so there is a lot of detail that needs to be worked out. Of course, we would not want a boiler-plate system; we would want a system that suits our particular needs here in the Northwest Territories. We would also, of course, want funding that was secure and long-term, that would ensure that, once we start to offer a pharmacare program, we would be able to continue offering it. We are interested in seeing this happen, but we are not at the stage yet of negotiating these details.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. I am not asking the Minister for negotiating the details right now. Does this Cabinet support Bill C-213, and have they communicated their position to our Member of Parliament? He has to vote on this bill tomorrow. Does this Cabinet support Bill C-213, yes or no, and can you communicate that with our MP?

HON. JULIE GREEN: As I mentioned before, the Cabinet does support a national pharmacare program represented in this case by Bill C-213. I am not aware about what conversations have happened with the MP about this bill. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. If I could respectfully suggest, then, that the Premier pick up the phone and call our MP and say, "Get on this. We support it. Please vote in favour"? However, I want to ask what else our government is actually doing to try to promote a national pharmacare program, so can the Minister answer that question for me? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: This area has not received the attention it deserves, primarily because it has coincided with the pandemic, and federal and territorial resources have been focused on that. However, the Member may recall that, in October 2020, the federal Speech from the Throne invited provinces and territories to participate in federal, provincial, and territorial discussions on a national strategy for high-cost drugs for rare diseases, and in fact, the NWT has been participating in that dialogue. There is a public engagement going on now on high-cost drugs for rare diseases, and it continues until March 26th.

A second FPT forum that we've been involved with has to do with increasing our participation in the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance. This is an alliance that negotiates with pharmaceutical companies on volume purchases of drugs in order to reduce the costs. Thank you.