

# Not all covered for abortion pill

The following is an edited exchange taken from a transcript of Hansard on Wednesday. In the legislative assembly, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green is questioning Health and Social Services Minister Glen Abernethy on birth control.

**JULIE GREEN:** Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. There is a group of low- or no-income non-Indigenous women who do not qualify for birth control or the new abortion pill. Why not? Thank you.

**GLEN ABERNETHY:** The Mifegymiso pill is actually something that is prescribed by physicians in the Northwest Territories, so it can be prescribed. I think the difficulty that we have is that it is not covered by all of our insurance programs or supplementary health programs that we have out there.

We know in the Northwest Territories there is a gap of individuals who are not covered by our supplemental health programs and do not have insurance from their employer.

All other individuals can get this covered. In that light, we are conducting an internal review of the supplementary health benefits program, and that work is happening right now with the view of addressing the coverage gaps that exist that I think this particular pill falls under. We are hoping to get that review done so that we can have some informed discussions with members and the public on how we can work together to close that gap and in an equitable, affordable, and fair way.

**GREEN:** I appreciate the answer from the minister. I am glad to hear that he is proactively reviewing gaps such as the one that I have highlighted today. I want to point out to him that it is not just the new abortion pill. It is also birth control. Birth control is specifically excluded. Is that being reviewed, as well?

**ABERNETHY:** Drugs that are covered under extended health benefits or non-insured health benefits that are covered by the federal government go through a lengthy process to

determine whether they are covered. I am not sure why that particular medication is not covered, but I do know that it is covered by a large number of insurances, that it is covered by NIHB (Non-Insured Health Benefits) and other things, so it would be covered for a large number of the residents of the Northwest Territories.

What we are doing is a review of our supplemental health programs, which is going to focus in on the gap of individuals that are not covered, so low-income families who do not have insurance and what to cover for. We are going to get that work done so that we can all have an informed discussion in this house, in the public, about how we could have an affordable, equitable, fair supplemental health program for all residents of the Northwest Territories.

**GREEN:** I appreciate the minister's answer, but he did not answer the question. We were talking about, on the one hand, the provision of medical abortion; on the other hand, birth control. Neither is covered for this vulnerable group of women. Is the minister also looking at the birth control end of it?

**ABERNETHY:** I kind of feel like I did answer the question. Maybe the member did not like it. The bottom line is we are doing a review of the supplemental health program. If these things are covered under other insurances, like NIHB, we want to find a way to make sure that those low-income families without insurance are getting covered appropriately, and we need to make sure that it is done affordably, equitably, and fairly for all residents of the Northwest Territories. That includes all drugs, not just the ones that the member is talking about today, that are covered under existing programs, that are not covered for this group.

**GREEN:** Thank you to the minister for that response. So, the new medical abortion pill, Mifegymiso, is available in Yellowknife. I am wondering when the government will make



**JULIE GREEN:** GNWT should help those who pay out of pocket for birth control and abortion pills.



**GLEN ABERNETHY:** Says review of supplemental health programs is ongoing.

this pill available in regional centres that have doctors or midwives.

**ABERNETHY:** Mifegymiso is actually provided through the Northern Options for Women program, which offers reproductive choices and abortion services for all women of reproductive age in the Northwest Territories, as well as the Kitikmeot Region of Nunavut. This program is currently offered in Yellowknife, the member is correct, as well as Inuvik when we have particular physicians who have the knowledge providing local coverage in that area.

Consideration is currently being given to support the NOW program, which is the Northern Options for Women program, in other regional centres of the Northwest Territories so that it is available in a wider range throughout the Northwest Territories.

We are exploring those options now to try to determine the cost and make sure that it could be done in a fair, equitable, and affordable way.

## FROM Hansard

# Record temperatures hit Yellowknife

Northern News Services

## 40 years ago

After breaking five all-time low temperature records in December, Yellowknife popped back up and cracked three all time highs so far in February.

The first was Feb. 8 when it was -6 F, one degree above the high of -7 F set in 1954. Feb. 20 the mercury soared to 5 F above compared to the record of -8 F set in 1953, and Feb. 21 it was 1 degree above 0 F, also breaking the 1953 record of -6 F for that day.

Incidentally the record lows for Feb. 20 and 21 were -41 F in 1963 and -42 F in 1962.

## 30 years ago

Heritage plaques were to start appearing on Yellowknife's historic buildings that

summer, thanks to a group that was as much a part of Yellowknife heritage as any building.

The Daughters of the Midnight Sun (DMS) donated what was left of their funds to have heritage plaques prepared, said Helen Parker, then chairman of the heritage committee's sub committee looking after the heritage plaques.

The DMS was no longer active, she explained, noting that their last activity had been selling cookbooks during Yellowknife Homecoming in 1984.

The sub-committee hoped to have some of Yellowknife's historic buildings recognized with plaques by the summer.

## 20 years ago

After years of fighting unsuccessfully to have houseboaters pay property taxes, the city was ordered to pay two Yellowknife Bay residents \$500 each.

The NWT assessment appeal tribunal ordered the city to pay Fraser Weir and Louise Charbonneau costs for appearing at a tax hearing the tribunal had already ruled shouldn't have taken place.

"The appellants (houseboaters) would not have had to do the additional work required to prepare for this hearing if the City of Yellowknife had implemented the decision as directed," wrote tribunal chairman Jim Currie in the Feb. 13 decision.

Weir said the city still showed a blatant disregard for tribunal decisions.

Weir noted the tribunal ordered the city to implement the decision "immediately" but he had not heard a word from the city since the tribunal hearing.

The city assessor Grant Lloyd agreed the hearing was unnecessary, but said it was due in part to the fact that the tribunal took eight months after the February 1997 hearing to rule that the city should not tax houseboats. By that time the tax rolls that included houseboats for the next year had already been prepared.

"At that point we should have contacted Fraser and Louise," he said. He also said that the city had no intention of charging

houseboaters 1998 taxes in light of the decision.

The NWT Supreme Court at the time was also considering the city's request for the right to tax and regulate houseboats on Yellowknife Bay.

## 10 years ago

The latest attempt in getting a Northern city on TV was a project by Omni Films. The film company, out of Vancouver, was in town with director Lionel Goddard at Buffalo Airways filming the pilot episode, that if successful, would turn into a series about the airline.

Goddard said, after spending some time filming the characters of the airline employees – who come from all over – will make people want to watch the show.

He also said the program would be able to teach Canadians about what goes on in the North.

"People have no idea what type of work is going on here," he said. "The rest of the country has become a very safe and secure world but up here, life still happens."

With the pilot episode in production, the next step was to get broadcasters in both the US and Canada interested in the show. Goddard predicted that the show would be "an easy sell."

"We think it's got all the ingredients of an exciting series," he said.



## LOOKING Back

with Candace A. McQuatt



**Lionel Goddard of Omni Films shoots** footage of mechanic Curtis Dyson at Buffalo Airways in 2008. That pilot episode turned into a popular series about the airline, called *Ice Pilots*.

NWSL file photo

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