



North Shore MLAs talk health care, transportation at Chamber meeting



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North Shore MLAs Susie Chant, Karin Kirkpatrick and Bowinn Ma talked to North Vancouver Chamber members at meeting Thursday. | Jane Seyd / North Shore News

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Difficulty finding doctors on the North Shore, challenges faced by small business amid a labour shortage and the perennial topic of transportation dominated a discussion with North Shore MLAs hosted by the North Vancouver Chamber Thursday morning.

In a recent survey of chamber members, access to health care was the number one issue after transportation.

North Vancouver Seymour MLA Susie Chant, who is a registered nurse, pointed to moves being made by the province to speed up and simplify the process for internationally trained nurses and doctors to obtain credentials in B.C. Chant said one of her legislature colleagues, who trained as a nurse in India, took five years to be able to work as an RN in B.C. One of the problems is that is a multi-layered process, she said. "That's where things get tangled. Not only that, but it also involves money," she added.

West Vancouver Capilano MLA Karin Kirkpatrick said B.C.'s red tape over credentials and additional residency requirements for foreign-trained doctors and nurses has resulted in the province losing medical personnel to Alberta.

North Vancouver Lonsdale MLA Bowinn Ma said the requirements for certification aren't set up by government, but by independent colleges which govern both nurses and doctors in the province. "We have to trust their expertise to a great extent," she said.

Changes have also been made to immigration rules to prioritize people with health care and childcare backgrounds, she added.

Kirkpatrick said she'd also like to see more seats open in Capilano University's early childcare education training program. Currently there's a desperate need for childcare workers, she said. "We are talking about adding more childcare spaces and we can't staff them," she added. "If they don't exist, it doesn't matter what the cost is for childcare."

All three MLAs agreed the issues of labour shortages, housing costs and transportation woes are closely tied on the North Shore. "People can't afford to live close to where they work," said Ma, adding many traffic problems are related to commutes to work on the North Shore.

Ma said the province has invested significant money into TransLink over the past three years to keep the system going with ridership plummeting during the early days of the pandemic.

A Burrard Inlet rapid transit line running between Metrotown and Park Royal is in the next 10-year plan for the region, said Ma.

Kirkpatrick said that's not fast enough. "We can't wait 10 years," she said, adding traffic on the North Shore is "worse than Mexico City.... We're waiting too long to address it," she said.

"We're not getting prioritized."

Ma countered that more provincial funding is going to beefing up TransLink now than there ever was during the previous Liberal government. Between 2009 and 2017, "Not a single additional hour of bus service was added in the entire Lower Mainland," she said. "The previous government did not prioritize public transit."

Other topics covered in the discussion included the difficulties smaller companies have in bidding on government contracts, and the impact of employers footing the bill for additional paid sick days and an expected increase to the minimum wage. The MLAs also discussed the impacts of climate change and efforts to get away from using fossil fuels.

jseyd@nsnews.com

twitter.com/JaneSeyd

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