

## Landfill search rally echoes national call

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AS the rallying cry to search Manitoba landfills for human remains rang out across the country, hundreds gathered outside the legislative building in Winnipeg to share their pain, anger and solidarity.

Bannock and soup were handed out, prayers were voiced, songs were sung and a round dance formed to the sound of drums Monday afternoon, as around 200 supporters clad in red chanted “Bring her home,” “Shame,” and “Search the landfill.”

Signage and speeches focused on two First Nations women, Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran — who Winnipeg police say are victims of an accused serial killer and whose remains are believed to be in the Prairie Green Landfill north of the city.

Myran’s grandmother, Donna Bartlett, was one of many speakers who took aim at the Tory government and Premier Heather Stefanson, calling the province’s decision not to support any such search “heartless.”

“Stefanson doesn’t want to go look for her. If it was her granddaughter or her daughter, she would look right away, no questions asked,” Bartlett said. “So why not dig our women out and bring them home?”

Stefanson has stood by the decision since it was first announced in July, citing health and safety concerns listed in the landfill search feasibility report released at that time.

She reiterated her position several times while on the campaign re-election trail Monday, calling fellow political party leaders Wab Kinew and Dougald Lamont’s promises to search the landfill unrealistic, during a morning radio debate.

“In the report itself, it says that there are considerable risks due to exposure to toxic chemicals and asbestos, and that there’s no guaranteed outcome... In the report, it says, it talks about \$184 million (cost for a search), so what (Kinew and Lamont) are saying is that they would go ahead and spend that — so where are they going to find the money for that?” she said.

At an unrelated new conference later in the day, the Tory leader (and candidate for Tuxedo) pledged to “continue to work with the community to ensure that we prevent this from happening again.”

“When it comes to the landfill search, listen, this is a very difficult decision that needed to be made as premier of Manitoba. And I stand by the decision that has been made,” Stefanson said.

On the legislature grounds, Felicia Fiddler wore a laminated photo of Myran around her neck while telling the crowd about her sister, who she described as “Everything to everyone that knew her.”

The cost of the trauma the province’s decision will have on her family and Indigenous people across the province, she said, will far outweigh the cost to search the landfill.

“She has a family. She has children. Imagine your nieces or nephews or grandchildren are begging for their mom to come home or wanting to visit their grave after telling them their mama is no longer here,” Fiddler said.

“How do you explain that to these sweet, innocent babies, mommy doesn’t have a grave, she’s in the trash? Or do we just take them to the landfill and have them question what we are doing at the dump?”

“Recognize the imprint you are leaving on not only us, but the children.”

Some in attendance had spent most of their young lives impacted by violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Elroy Fontaine was a child in foster care when his older sister, Tina Fontaine, 15, was reported missing in Winnipeg in 2014. Her body was pulled from the Red River a week later.

The 2018 murder trial of a middle- aged man ended in an acquittal.

Elroy Fontaine, now a teenager, addressed the crowd Monday. Emotional, he struggled to find the words, as those gathered cheered and drummed in support.

Systems in place in Manitoba have continued to fail its most vulnerable people in the nine years since he lost his sister, he said.

“Time and time again, we have to rally, we have to stand together. And what has changed?” Fontaine said.

“We see numbers and numbers of people go missing and murdered every single day, and no one bats an eye.”

— with files from Danielle Da Silva and Carol Sanders