

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 25-18(2): SENIORS' HOUSING SHORTAGES

February 19, 2016

MS. GREEN: My questions are for the Minister responsible for Seniors. How is the government preparing for the greater number of seniors and their needs?

MR. SPEAKER: Mahsi. The Minister responsible for Seniors, Mr. Abernethy.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: There's a number of things we're doing, but I'll focus primarily on the beds that we're going to need for seniors here in the Northwest Territories. We've just completed our long-term care review, which I'm going to be sharing with committee in the coming weeks. I'm in the process of just drafting a letter to send to committee so that I can share it with them, and hopefully we'll have an opportunity to sit down for a meeting. But I'll give some up front numbers: By 2026 this government is going to be 259 beds short in long-term care. Forty-seven of those are in the Beaufort Delta, ten of those are in the Sahtu, 29 in the Deh Cho, five in the Tlicho region, 123 in Yellowknife, 31 in South Slave, and 14 in Fort Smith.

This is a significant number. On average, it costs us about \$130,000 a bed to operate a long-term care bed in the Northwest Territories, and on average anywhere from \$800,000 to \$1.5 million per bed to construct long-term care. We have a significant challenge in front of us. I'm looking forward to bringing the report to committee and having discussions on how we can move forward on this. We are starting to put together a draft plan to have some discussions with committee.

The bottom line is we're going to have to think outside the box on this one. We're going to have to look for creative solutions. We're going to have to work with partners to find a way to provide these 259 beds for our aging population here in the Northwest Territories.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Minister, for that response and for that new information that quantifies the size of the problem. It's actually much larger than I had anticipated. There's some long-term work that needs to be done, but there are immediate needs, too, that come out of our broken continuum of housing for seniors, with these seniors who have dementia and long-term care needs that are currently inappropriately housed. What kinds of short-term solutions might the government be able to offer these seniors?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: We do have the Territorial Admissions Committee that actually helps us in focusing and prioritizing individuals, so individuals with higher needs can move up the list, but as I have indicated, we have a significant shortage of beds. Currently, I believe we're about 60 beds short here in the Northwest Territories, and that will be part of the 259 that we're going to be short by 2026. We're working with CAP, we're working with Avens on coming up with some solutions in the short-term for Yellowknife. But this isn't just a Yellowknife problem. We've got problems in the Beaufort Delta where we have our residents in acute care units rather than long-term care units, which isn't desirable at all. We're looking at putting together a plan, working

with committee for some short-, medium- and long-term wins. I don't necessarily know what all those solutions are at this point, but I really do look forward to having a sit-down with committee, and as I said, I am drafting the letter to send to them to share the report and to have initial discussions on how we can move together to address this oncoming problem.

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Minister. Now, there was going to be money set aside from an athletes' village for the Canada Winter Games, which is likely not going to be needed because the bid won't take place. Is it possible to use that money and multiply it with federal money in order to provide an additional \$24 million to go into seniors' care?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: No official dollars are actually allocated. We had committed as a government in the 17th Assembly, and I know the minister today is also committed to working with the Assembly to find the dollars to support the Canada Winter Games bid. We were going to find those dollars, but no official dollars have actually been allocated into our budget.

I can say that the federal government has announced they're going to invest in social infrastructure and I had an opportunity to meet with the minister responsible, and we talked about some of the needs that we have in the Northwest Territories. Seniors' housing was one of the issues that we raised with them, and it's also one of the pillars that were identified. We don't have a lot of detail on how those social infrastructure dollars are going to be spent or what the criteria are, but we are working closely with the federal government so that they can inform us so that we can apply for it accordingly.

But as I said, we're looking for pretty much any avenue we can to find a way to meet our needs and we do need to think outside the box on this one. We're going to have to seek partners in every area to help us meet this 259-bed shortage by 2026.

MS. GREEN: Will the Minister look at the possibility of a P3 arrangement to provide this kind of care for seniors?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: We need to look for any avenue to help us. Traditional procurement might be appropriate in some communities and regions; it may not be in others. Our minds need to be open to pretty much any option. The federal government is a potential other partner. In the previous government I'd been asked whether or not we would be supportive of private businesses coming in and setting up long-term care facilities. This is something that we're supportive of. There's no reason somebody couldn't come in and start up a long-term care facility if they wanted. But at the same time we need to make sure that we have a plan and a system to put and support 259 beds in the Northwest Territories by 2026, which isn't a long time, and the demand is increasing daily. This is a significant amount of work and I once again am looking forward to working with committee and sharing the report with them so that we can begin those important discussions.