

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 329-18(2): INCOME ASSISTANCE AND CANADA CHILD TAX BENEFIT

October 17, 2016

MS. GREEN: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I wonder if the Minister could tell me what the rationale is for reducing clothing and food benefits to income-assistance recipients since the introduction of the Canada child tax benefit? Masi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, previous, before we made the changes to the income assistance program, the federal child benefit was actually counted as income. What we did was we took that child tax benefit out of the assessment, which came out of the food and clothing and used it to recalculate how we get the new funding going forward. So it was actually part of the food and clothing. That came out, so it wouldn't be re-assessed again. The NWT contribution remained the same. That is what is shown. It was just taken out to do a different way of re-calculating. That is what the Member is referring to, I believe.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate that the Minister has now enabled income assistance recipients to keep a wider range of income than was previously the case. However, the amount of money paid for both food and clothing has been reduced for income assistance recipients. How can the Minister justify reducing these assistance amounts when they are meant to alleviate poverty for the people who are most in need?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: When we restructured the program, the Federal Child Tax Benefit was included in the assessments. We took those assessments out. Our contribution, the NWT's contribution, hasn't changed. That's what the Member is seeing, that number now, not included with the federal dollars. So not that the federal dollars are out and we're not assessing it. It does look like the funding went down for food and clothing, which, in fact, it hasn't. Actually, more families are getting more money.

Since we haven't had any concerns brought forward since we did the implementation, as a result we did do a review. We reviewed 171 families since we did the implementation. I just want to share a couple of quick stats, here. Since we put the changes in, we have seen an increase in approximately 14 per cent from July to September for our families. In July, approximately \$79,000 of children's federal benefits was counted as income. September of that year, families were getting a reported total approximately of \$166,000 extra in that month. So instead of taking \$79,000 back, we actually increased it to \$166,000. On average, that's about \$500 extra per family, and then 17 of the 171 families received a total of \$10,120 in September in child support payments. The government has not reduced its food and clothing allowance. It has remained the same. We just took out the Child Tax Benefit and have actually given families more money since the implementation.

MS. GREEN: The information I'm drawing on is information that the Minister provided. We're talking about the amount of money that's paid to income assistance recipients. In every example that the Minister provided, the amount of money paid for clothing and for food has gone down. While the bottom line for most people is better, it's not as good as it could be because the overall effect of the Canada Child Tax Benefit has been diminished. So my question again is:

how can the Minister justify not enabling families to collect the whole amount that they are eligible for?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: In fact, they are collecting every cent that's come from the federal government. As I said before, our dollars didn't change, their contributions didn't change, and all the examples that the Member is referring to in the presentation we gave her, we took out the Federal Child Tax Benefit and it has been recalculated so that families actually get every cent that they were supposed to get from the federal government. Our contribution hasn't changed. So every example is just that Federal Child Tax Benefit coming out so that families can get every cent that they were entitled to.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister for that answer. I think one of the major issues here is that I needed the help of the research department to understand exactly what was going on in the administration of these benefits. I stand by the remarks that I made, that every example shows a decrease in both food and clothing allowances. So I understand the Minister doesn't believe that this is the case, but that's what my research shows. So maybe -- and this is going to turn into a comment rather than a question. I'll follow up with written questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.