

Constituency Newsletter

From the Assembly

Premier McLeod's First Six Months

I challenged Premier Bob McLeod to make good on promises and approaches he made when running for Premier. He promised change on a number of fronts but he continues to run an executive-style government with limited input from Regular MLAs. MLAs too often find out what Cabinet is doing from the media. Issues flagged as priorities – such as economic diversification and finding solutions to the long-term care bed shortage – have yet to take flight. I will continue to closely follow how the Premier lives up to his election promises and insist on accountability.

The Public Guardian Needs More Staff

The Public Guardian is facing a backlog of applications from vulnerable people who may be unable to make decisions about their own care and well-being. The office is also hard pressed to provide the monitoring service that is a core responsibility. I will be following up with the Minister of Health and Social Services about the assessment of the office now underway to ensure it meets our residents' needs.

Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Stalled

The NWT chief coroner has raised the alarm about the overuse and misuse of prescription drugs by addicts seeking multiple prescriptions. Doctors may be unaware of other prescriptions for patients who come from another NWT region. As a means of preventing overdose deaths, it's time for Health and Social Services to invest in a monitoring program. The Minister didn't commit the necessary resources but said the amalgamation of all the health authorities will lay the ground work for this oversight to take place in the future.

Lottery Funds for the Arts Too

The entire \$4 million share of Western Canada lottery revenue goes to territorial sports and recreation organizations. In most other jurisdictions, that revenue is shared with the arts. Not only does investment in the arts support children's self-expression and skill development but it also lays the ground work for a promising growth sector of the economy. The Minister committed to exploring options for change.

Sole Source Contract Limits Go Up

The value of sole source contracts has doubled, even quadrupled, depending on the type of service being contracted. Government reporting on sole source contracting has fallen behind yet more than \$80 million was spent sole source during the last year for which there's a report (2014-15). That report reveals that managers often award former politicians and retired bureaucrats with sole source contracts, bypassing the delay or administrative burden of competitive bids. I will continue to push for more accountability in this area.

Junior Kindergarten For All?

The territorial government is renewing its push to introduce junior kindergarten in every NWT community for the 2017-18 school year. Some communities already have strong programs for four year olds such as Aboriginal Head Start in eight locations, and the Montessori school in Yellowknife. The loss of the four-year olds will jeopardize the financial health and future of these programs as well as day care. The Minister has not said how he is going to accommodate these existing programs. This is an issue that will be front and centre in the next session.



Commissioner George Tuccaro swore me in as an MLA. We worked together at CBC before meeting again here at the Legislative Assembly. His term as Commissioner ended in May and a new commissioner will be appointed by the federal government. I wish him and Marilyn a happy and healthy retirement.

Constituency Meeting

The Legislative Assembly's next session is October 13 to November 3. We will review next year's Capital Budget.

Tuesday October 11

Baker Centre 7 PM

Please come and share your issues and concerns.

Major Budget Review in May-June Session

2016-17 Operating Budget

The territorial government's budget for the 2016-17 fiscal year engaged the time and attention of all MLAs for the three months leading up for the vote on it at the end of June. The budget provides a little less than \$2 billion in spending, an increase despite cuts to jobs and programs.

The finance minister said the purpose of the cuts was to create an operating surplus. This money, combined with federal dollars, would help to address the NWT's \$3 billion infrastructure deficit.

There is some disagreement between Regular MLAs and Cabinet about the size of the operating surplus and what it will be used for. This issue will likely be a sticking point as preparation of the budget for the next fiscal year begins with business plan review in September, and the capital spending budget will be debated when the session begins mid-October.

An example of the disagreement about priorities is the road to Whati. Fortune Minerals requested government build the road to make their NICO mining project more economically feasible. The leadership in Whati agrees with building a road, and a proposal is now being assessed by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Assessment Review Board.

I question whether a road is what the community of Whati needs most. The economic assessment show the road's benefits are meagre. Meanwhile, the core housing need in the community is one of the highest in the territory, with almost half of the homes either in need of major repair or too small for the number of people living in them. My priority is addressing this housing crisis because doing so will improve the health and well-being of people in Whati.

Without a clear vision at the top, there wasn't a vision to share with the civil service about our common values. And there still isn't.

Excerpt of my reply to the Budget Address – June 7, 2016

"It soon became clear that departments were also struggling with the vision thing. Cabinet gave them targets for cuts. If there were principles for making cuts, or a focus, it's not clear what they were. What we ended up with is a mixture of staff and program reductions. It's as if we went through the house to gather stuff for a garage sale. "Well there's this fondue set we got for a wedding present we never use," "When was the last night anyone played this game?" "This was an expensive winter coat but it never did fit properly."

As recently as mid-May, regular MLAs warned the government that they were unconvinced that generating a \$150 million surplus was realistic or necessary, yet in last week's budget the finance minister said our target is \$150 million in savings or new revenues, to establish a short term cash surplus position by the end of the 18th Assembly. Mr. McLeod goes on to report that the budget he presented last week represents 45 per cent of that total. So that means that the exercise we've just been through is going to come around again as soon as the fall when business plans for the next fiscal year are presented to regular MLAs."

Read more at <http://yellowknifecentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-06-08-Reply-to-the-Budget-Address.pdf>



I joined the Elvis Presley impersonators from Weledeh School—that's the "Welvises"—for fundraising at the Yellowknife Association for Community Living's annual Gumboot Rally this spring.

Working on Our Priorities

Standing Committee on Social Development

Housing

There's good news to report on housing from the last session. In an effort to focus government efforts on increasing "the availability of safe, affordable housing" included in the mandate for the 18th Assembly, Regular MLAs passed a motion that will help us fulfill that goal and deliver on our election commitments.

I introduced the motion; it was seconded by Michael Nadli, the MLA for Dehcho and supported by our Regular Member colleagues. Housing is an important issue in each of our ridings whether urban, like mine, or small community, like Michael's. Having a decent, affordable house big enough for the whole family is fundamental to success in everything that happens outside the house as well, including school and work.

According to the NWT Bureau of Statistics, about 20 per cent of housing (including public housing units) is in core need. That means it is inadequate (needs substantial repairs), unsuitable (is too small for the number of people living in the unit) or unaffordable (costs more than 30 per cent of the household gross income). This situation remained unchanged between the 2009 and 2014 NWT housing surveys.

The motion from Regular MLAs calls on government to invest in housing in order to reduce the core need by two per cent a year for the next four years. This goal, if realized, will bring us in line with the national average. The motion directed government to create a comprehensive and fully-costed plan to achieve this goal and to deliver that plan in October.



I joined Imelda King at her the Farmers Market where she serves up yummy food from her friend's stall, Great Slave Fish Delights. The market injects \$1 million into the Yellowknife economy yearly.

Family Violence

Understanding attitudes toward family violence is key to creating effective marketing aimed at prevention. A survey conducted by GNWT Bureau of Statistics revealed a quarter of men and 16 per cent of women believe that violence between a couple is a private matter to be resolved within the family. Women are more likely than men to state that pushing, grabbing or shoving a family member constituted family violence. There's a general reluctance to define family violence as a problem for which help is needed.

These attitudes may have changed because the survey that documented them is now almost 10 years old. Meanwhile the rate of family violence remains stubbornly high at nine times the national average (StatsCan), despite our best efforts at prevention. It's time to do the survey again so that we can create specific messages and approaches

aimed at reducing the rate of family violence. The Minister Responsible for the Status of Women agreed with me and said she would advocate for the money to repeat it in the next budget.

Seniors

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day gave me an opportunity to highlight the work of the NWT Network to Prevent Abuse of Older Adults. Elder abuse can take many forms, but financial abuse and neglect are the most common in the NWT. Almost three-quarters of older adults in NWT report that abuse is a problem in their communities.

The NWT Network recently completed a five year plan to make seniors safe in their own homes and communities. The minister of health and social services has committed to work in partnership with seniors to implement the 20 recommendations in the report. In addition to action at the official level, we all have a role to play in preventing elder abuse and creating safe, secure and caring communities. For more about this important issue, visit the Network's website: <http://www.nwtnetwork.com/>



Education Minister Alfred Moses inducted Muriel Tolley into the Education Hall of Fame this year in recognition of her illustrious contributions to the quality of NWT education.



I attended the unveiling of a mural depicting the four seasons at Mildred Hall School. The event was attended by ECE department Deputy Minister David Stewart, YK1 Board Chair John Stephenson, mural artist Sarah Bradfield, Clark Builders VP Dave Brothers, Yellowknife Mayor Mark Heyck and me.

Safe, Warm and Essential

With Yellowknife's growing population of street people downtown, the Safe Harbour Day Shelter is an essential service for them and the community.

Between 20 and 100 clients use the shelter each day. They find a safe place out of the weather, breakfast and snacks, bathroom facilities, access to limited health and counseling services and—perhaps above all—the companionship and caring we all need.

Safe Harbour is operated by the NWT Disabilities Council with funding from GNWT and the City of Yellowknife on a contract that expires on October 1, 2016. Katelyn Gibbons is the team leader for the staff of six, who work in teams of three.

Gibbons says the rules are few: “Don’t drink on the premises and don’t fight.” As to why the community should care for shelter clients and support the operations of the shelter, she reminds us that the clients “are people in need” within our prosperous society. She estimates that 80 per cent of shelter users are long term Yellowknifers—even though most weren’t born here.

Facilities in the aged building are very modest compared to other public health facilities. There’s a TV room, rest area, phone and email access, and tables and chairs for cards and visiting. Gibbons says the biggest deficiency of the facility is adequate space. On the coldest days, Safe Harbour is packed, not the best setting for people who may be intoxicated and unhappy about being crowded.

While it’s sometimes forgotten now, the downtown day shelter was born of the need to provide a warm shelter and rest rooms for street people, reducing their need to occupy malls, lobbies and stores.

Having a day shelter is not a solution to the problems of chronic homelessness, addictions or severe mental health issues. The shelter attempts a compassionate and immediate response to these symptoms of deeper injury.



Day Shelter Team Leader Katelyn Gibbons and the therapy dog Timber welcomed me on my visit to the Safe Harbour Day Shelter.



Ivan Ceria (left) and Emmanuel Lamvu from William McDonald School served as pages in the Legislative Assembly during the May-June session.

Your Input is Important

I need to know what you think and what actions you want to see.

Julie Green

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Did you know?

Public Housing Rent Assessments

Public housing rents are now assessed annually, eliminating the need to file monthly income statements. For information on how your public housing rent is calculated, call **1 844 698 4663**

Arsenic Warnings

The NWT Chief Public Health Officer is advising residents of the Northwest Territories about precautions they can take to avoid exposure to elevated arsenic in lakes near the Giant Mine property. Go to “Advisories” under the GNWT Health and Social Services main website main page for information.

Premier and Cabinet Open House

Meet with the Premier and all Cabinet Ministers Tuesday October 18 from 7 to 9 PM in the Great Hall of the Legislative Assembly to discuss your issues and priorities.