

Constituency Newsletter

From the Assembly

Better Reporting Coming on Sole Source Contracts

The trend line for government-awarded sole source contracts is heading straight up. About 25 per cent of all contracts let in 2014-15 (at a total value of \$90 million) were awarded by sole source. That means there was no tender or test to see whether taxpayers are getting the best value for money. I have been asking for better oversight. In the last session, the Minister of Finance delivered the sole source contract report for 2015-16 and he promised to provide quarterly reporting starting in November 2016 and to do a quality assurance review for the last fiscal year.

Frequency of Home Care Visits

The frequency of home care visits was a hot topic at my last constituency meeting. Older adults are concerned that visits were decreasing at a time when they need more help. In response to my questions, the Minister of Health and Social Services said there have been no funding cuts to the home care program. The more likely problem, given the aging population of Yellowknife, is that there is more demand for service. How to meet these needs is the subject of the continuing care review that is underway now. The minister has said that until he has the review, he's not going to change current spending priorities or make new investments. He has committed to sharing the review when complete by the end of March.

It's Time to Rethink Records of Non-Conviction

Records of non-conviction list the times you have had an encounter with the police: calls made, questions asked, a charge laid but no conviction. This information doesn't amount to a criminal record but it's recorded on the same form. The result is that an employer

looking for a "clean" record may balk at hiring someone who has a non-conviction record, but is guilty of no offense. It's possible to obtain a pardon for a conviction but not for a non-conviction, so this information haunts people for a lifetime. The Minister of Justice doesn't agree this practice is unjust. I will be following up to change this.

J.H. Sissons School Retrofit on Hold

J.H. Sissons is the oldest school in the NWT. It's well past its mid-life retrofit yet the GNWT has no plans for improvements. During capital budget review, the minister of education, culture and employment said that the money allocated for a planning study in the last capital budget— a necessary preliminary step to obtain funding — is no longer available. It was used instead to fix the roof at William McDonald School. Sissons isn't at the 85 per cent capacity threshold and it's not dangerous for students. So the minister says the upgrade is going to remain on the back burner until the government can increase the pot of money for renovations. This isn't what any of us want, so I'll be pushing for earlier action.

Constituency Meeting

The Legislative Assembly's next session is January 31 to March 10. We will review next year's Operations and Maintenance Budget.

Constituency Meeting
Wednesday January 25
Baker Centre 7 PM

Please come and share your issues and concerns.

Day Shelter Update

The location of the Safe Harbour Day Shelter has been controversial for downtown residents, especially people at Northern Heights. The Minister of Health and Social Services provided a good news/bad news update on the shelter in October. The good news is that he committed to moving the shelter as soon as a more suitable location is found. And, the shelter will extend its hours to 7 am to 7 pm. This will reduce loitering until the emergency shelters open at night and after they close in the morning. The bad news is that the department hasn't identified a new location. One possibility is combining the day shelter with the sobering centre (see story "One Step Forward" on page three) in one location.



I was honoured to meet with a group of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (Canadian Region) for its annual outreach event, this time in Regina in October, and to have dinner with Saskatchewan Lieutenant Governor Vaughn Solomon Schofield (centre). The event included a day with a group of young women who are emerging leaders. These women will be attending the Daughters of the Vote event in Ottawa in March to learn about leadership, government and politics AND celebrate the 100th anniversary of the beginning of women's suffrage. There will be an NWT Daughters of the Vote event with young women from every region in Yellowknife in February. I am proud to chair this event and to encourage women to consider running for office.

One Step Forward

A Solid Plan to Improve Life for All Downtown

Residents in Yellowknife Centre have long been concerned about the increasing number of people who appear to be homeless and/or intoxicated downtown. This problem requires a comprehensive response and now there is one in the form of the Yellowknife Homelessness Road Map Action Plan. The plan, created by a multi-sector working group under the leadership of Mayor Mark Heyck, includes short, medium and long-term actions.

Several of the recommendations of the working group are already being implemented, such as extending the hours of the day shelter to remove the gap in service for people who spend the night at an emergency shelter. Continued support for Housing First will provide housing for those who want it.

In order to deal with the increasing number of ambulance rides and emergency department visits, a street outreach service will be started in next six months. Staff in the program will circulate downtown, assessing the needs of intoxicated people and driving them to a place that can provide appropriate services. This recommendation leads to another innovation: the creation of a sobering centre that would provide a safe place for people to recover. This centre may eventually offer a managed alcohol program as a pilot project to assess its harm reduction potential. Managed alcohol programs provide regulated doses of alcohol. Studies show that people end up drinking less, crime goes down and people are more likely to move towards treatment. This helps not only the people in the program but takes the pressure off first responders, whose services are needed by all of us, not just the street people.



I attended Literacy Week celebrations with NWT Literacy Council's Katie Johnson.

The cost of the plan's 11 recommendations is approximately \$1 million a year. This represents an investment in all who live and work downtown, and moves us from being baffled by the problems to taking action on them. Congratulations to everyone involved!

One Step Backward

GNWT Ensures Poor Stay Poor

The rates of child poverty are both a national and territorial shame. Almost a quarter of NWT children live in poverty, according to 2014 figures from Statistics Canada. The federal government responded to this dismal situation by introducing the Canada Child Benefit and making a commitment to reduce child poverty by 40 per cent in 2017. The tax-free benefit provides \$6,400 a year for children under age 6 and \$5,400 for children ages 6 to 17.

But the benefit of this poverty-reduction measure has been blunted for income assistance recipients in the NWT. In October 2016, the territorial government stopped paying food and clothing

allowances to children under 18. The government hasn't given a reason for this change. Instead, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment has argued that families on income assistance are better off. That's because they are able to keep their government transfers (including the Canada Child Benefit) as well as child maintenance payments (if available). The net result is that poor families may be better off on the whole, but they are not getting the full benefit of this federal poverty-reduction initiative.

The decision by GNWT is not fair or smart. A recent report on child and family poverty in Canada says

"government transfers are critical and effective investments that reduce and prevent poverty among children and families." (Campaign 2000 Report Card 2016) An investment of \$9,214 per year will lift a lone parent family with one child above the poverty line. Once there, every indicator of child development improves, including health, success in education, employment prospects and life expectancy. Why wouldn't we want to do that for children in need?

I will keep pressure on the minister to reinstate the food and clothing allowances so the most needy have a chance to benefit fully from the Canada Child Benefit and break free of poverty.



The Rainbow Centre in Yellowknife offers programming and support to young people, especially those who identify themselves as queer, meaning gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, or who are questioning their gender or sexual identity. The centre officially opened at the end of August with several of my colleagues in attendance along with our Member of Parliament and the Mayor Yellowknife. Hats off to Jacq Brass (centre, kneeling) and the rest of the board for their hard work to get to this point.

Social Development Priorities

Standing Committee on Social Development

Working on our priorities

Junior Kindergarten: The government intends to launch junior kindergarten in every NWT school in September 2017. People agree that JK shows promise in helping prepare four year olds for school. Aboriginal Head Start, Yellowknife Montessori School, Yellowknife Play School and both licensed and unlicensed child care providers are worried that competition from a no-cost program will cripple them financially and make it more difficult to sustain their programs. School boards are rightly concerned that unless JK is fully funded by the government, implementation will come at the expense of other students. I led regular MLAs in proposing a motion asking government to provide a fully-costed plan for JK, and to acknowledge that a “one-size fits all” approach doesn’t serve the best interests of children and parents. This issue is sure to return during the Winter Sitting.

A New Day: A New Day (AND) is therapy program that shows men how to stop using violence to deal with anger. After the Autumn Sitting, the Minister of Justice agreed to extend AND for six months. Regular members had asked for a year but I’m satisfied a new request for proposals can be issued and a service provider chosen by the end of June.

A program evaluation revealed that 12 of 80 participants completed the 20-week program (a solid success rate for this type of program) and that it is effective at prevention if participants take at least ten weeks. Evaluators noted the need for this kind of program in communities outside of Yellowknife. Given high levels of family violence in NWT the Minister of Justice should take up this recommendation to ensure families across the NWT have the opportunity to heal.

Housing Shortage Ongoing: It is a priority of the 18th Assembly and my personal priority to increase “the availability of safe, affordable housing” across NWT. Regular Members and I passed a motion in June calling on government to reduce core need in housing by two per cent a year for four years, to bring us in line with the national average. Core need includes affordability (no more than 30% gross

income), adequacy (all major systems work) and suitability (an adequate number of bedrooms using national guidelines). The Minister of Housing’s response was disappointing because it didn’t provide the comprehensive and fully-costed plan requested. Instead, the minister says she is working with the other northern territories to lobby the federal government for a Northern Housing Strategy. That strategy is due out in 2017. Housing is fundamental to family well-being and I will continue to push the minister to make good on our mandate commitment.

Sexual Violence: I tabled important research by YWCA Yellowknife aimed at improving community response to sexual violence. The report is called Hush Hush No More and it’s available on the YWCA website: <http://ywcanwt.ca/family-violence/hush-hush-no-more>

Here are a few facts about sexual violence. Most victims are under 24, fewer than 10 per cent go to police and victims often blame themselves. The future can be different if we take action: make sure you and your loved ones know about the danger of sexual violence; learn how to keep yourself safe; understand what consent is (and isn’t); and provide support to people who disclose sexual violence in a non-judgmental way. In the meantime, the



Yellowknife MLAs welcomed about a hundred seniors to the Legislative Assembly for tea on December 14. There were musical performances and prize draws. The grand prize was a print of this year’s phone book cover, donated by Northwestel. Congratulations to Yellowknife Centre constituent Kay Naidoo on her win.

Minister of Health and Social Services is working on new policy and guidelines for health professionals who provide care to survivors of sexual assault. It is due for completion in March.



I attended the annual general meeting of the NWT Seniors Society. Present were (left to right, back row) Wendy Bisaro, Alternate; Leon Peterson, Immediate Past-President; me; Mary Pat Short, Vice-President; Mavis Klause, Director; Violet Beaulieu, Secretary; Ann Firth-Jones, President; Merlyn Williams, Treasurer; Sam Gargan, Director; (front row) Bea Campbell, Past-President; Doris Caudron, Alternate; Alphonsine McNeely, Alternate; Brenda Jerome, Director. Missing are Julia Cockney, Director; Florence Barnaby, Director; Sarah Anderson, Alternate; Margaret Rose Elleze, Alternate; Marg Shott, Alternate; Elizabeth Kunnizzie, Alternate

Celebrating a Year in Office

My one year anniversary as MLA for Yellowknife Centre was November 23. Thank you to those who supported me during the campaign and since then. And if you weren't a supporter or you weren't sure about my interests and abilities, I hope you are coming around. I have been working hard – both inside and outside the Legislative Assembly – to represent your interests. I've been on a steep and interesting learning curve. It's my first time being elected as an MLA so my first task was get a sense of my new role and how to exercise influence within it.

My first attempt at a motion – calling on government to create a disabilities action plan – was successful, with government making the commitment to produce the plan by the end of March.

My second motion – to reduce the core need in housing by two per cent a year for the next four years – has yet to bear fruit.

The results of my third motion – to ensure the implementation of junior kindergarten doesn't jeopardize existing programs for four year olds – won't be known until the department produces a fully-costed implementation plan in the new year.

The fourth motion, brought forward by my colleague Michael Nadli, which I seconded, has resulted in a six month extension for A New Day, the program that helps men take responsibility for family violence and learn new skills to resolve conflict. So this is life, some successes and some unknowns.

An important lesson for me in my first year is how slowly the wheels of government grind. A good idea today has to be adopted by the minister, incorporated by managers into the departmental business plans, reviewed by regular MLAs in the fall, and then debated when the budget is

presented in the winter before it can be implemented in the following fiscal year. No wonder four years goes by so quickly!

I feel I've also done good work promoting accountability on reporting on sole source contracts and the public accounts (the government's financial statements), holding the Premier to account for his promises when running for Premier and challenging the government decision to eliminate the food and clothing allowances provided by income assistance to children. And, of course, I have already started a list of questions to ask when the session resumes at the end of January.

As I start on year two of my term, I realize there are many important issues we discussed on the doorstep last year that need continuous attention, including economic diversification, more housing for seniors, and making Yellowknife a more affordable place to live.

I find helping constituents among the most rewarding work of being an MLA, whether they have having trouble getting into housing, need a letter of support for a project, or have problems

with government service delivery. I want to give a big shout out to my constituency assistant, Craig Yeo, for the great work he does triaging these calls and helping me find satisfactory answers. This service is available to all constituents, so if you have an issue you'd like help with, don't hesitate to call.

Did you know?

Housing Survey

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation (NWT HC) is conducting a survey on housing issues until the end of January. You can do the survey on-line, or get a paper copy to fill out from the Yellowknife Housing office at 5105 50 St, phone **873-5694**. Take the survey on-line at www.nwthousingsurvey.ca

Seniors Home Heating Subsidy

Low income seniors can get financial assistance to pay for heating. Seniors may be eligible to receive a set amount of wood, oil, propane, gas, and/or electricity depending on household income and the community in which they live. You can get an application or more information from the NWT Senior's Society at **1-800-661-0878**.



The fourth annual anti-poverty round table took place in Inuvik November 29-30. Here I am with Yellowknife Centre constituent Ben McDonald who was representing Alternatives North. Until there is significant government investment in poverty reduction, the indicators will show that nothing much has improved and some people are worse off. The band aids we now provide are not a solution; they trap people in poverty, sometimes for generations. It's time – well past time – for that to change.

Your Input is Important

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

Julie Green

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