

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 634-18(2): INDEPENDENT HOUSING FOR SENIORS

February 22, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of the Housing Corporation, also known as the Minister of Yes. What I described in my Member's statement is an immediate problem. This solution isn't tied to the housing survey or a new federal housing deal; it's a matter of assessing what the applicant's income would be on the day after they retire. That's all we need to do. So will the Minister direct her officials to adjust their own processes and initiate talks with the low-cost housing partners to take into account the differences between their pre- and post-retirement income? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of NWT Housing Corporation.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I do not want to be known as the Minister who always says yes, in this case I will say yes that we will consider that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I would like to ask my favourite Minister to consider that the best solution is to enable seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible, whether those homes are owned or rented. It may be financially advantageous to offer a rental subsidy to seniors to stay in place when they retire. To do so would probably be both less expensive than moving them into public housing and also less of a drain in having them move. So I wonder if the Minister will consider some kind of a rental subsidy specific to seniors that would allow to stay in own homes?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I am feeling like it is my birthday. In all honesty, seniors are a huge issue not only for myself but for all the Ministers sitting at the table here. We will be focusing a lot of effort within our program renewal on our provision of supports to seniors. So, yes, we will contemplate a rent-subsidy program on top of what we already have to accommodate seniors to age in place.

MS. GREEN: Just to clarify my question, I think the Minister understood the question, but I am not talking about people who own their own homes. I am talking about people who are in public housing. So they would get a subsidy to stay -- no, sorry, I am making things worse. I am talking about keeping seniors in their current rental units with transitional housing support, and then that would bring them off the waiting list for public housing. That is where I was going with that.

Moving on, the lack of available spots demonstrates the need to devote more of our limited budgets towards meeting the infrastructure need and, as I said, to keep people here in the territory. We keep hearing about meeting our road-work needs in the first two years of this mandate and easing people's misery later. Can the Minister offer any assurance that someday shelter for people will get its turn at the till?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I do want to address it even though it was just brought

up as a comment. The Transitional Rent Supplement Program would not be one that I would look at to address with seniors in its current form, in that it is only a two-year program and it is one of the policies that I do want to change. I do not believe that a two-year program is the most effective use of that funding. I also state that, when it comes to the till, to the money for housing, we are strong advocates federally. We have been knocking on the federal door. Our Prime Minister has promised us that there will be exciting news in the budget. I was hoping that would have come out at the end of this month, but it looks like it will come out in March. So we have been lobbying as the three territories -- not just the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and Nunavut as well -- in partnership, and the federal government has committed to having a three-territory housing strategy. So we are assuming that we will be receiving more money in the till soon.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I think it is a two-pronged approach. I think that we need more housing units, and we need to help people who cannot afford housing on the income that they have as retired people, and so I am interested to hear that the Minister is working on both of these fronts. Would she consider a rental subsidy program that would tide seniors over from the time they retire until they get to the top of one of waiting lists for subsidized housing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will consider the suggestion brought forward, and even though it was not suggested, I was hoping it would come out. We are looking at other options for seniors. I did have seniors come to me since I have been the Minister and state to me that it is not only a matter of accessing affordable housing, it is a matter of accessing safe housing. So I have had a number of seniors come to me and say that they do not feel safe in some of the apartment buildings in this community, and so we are looking at perhaps doing a pilot project where we can actually blend seniors, so only a seniors' complex that has market housing and low-income housing to provide more safe, secure housing that addresses the socialization and the safety needs of seniors.