

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 639-18(2): SUGAR TAX BEST PRACTICES

February 23, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my statement today I talked about the Finance Minister's budget commitment to explore a tax on sugary drinks. The government's revenue option paper from last year rejected a sugar tax as uneconomic in terms of administration because the expense of implementing it would be greater than the income earned. I was surprised to hear about it in the budget. What has changed the Minister's views in the last year? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Finance.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have to state the obvious when we talk about diabetes and obesity amongst the Northwest Territories. It is one of the reasons that we have decided to explore this option. The second one is the constant harping from the Minister of Health and Social Services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: That is good news, that health is the focus of bringing the tax into consideration. Is that the primary purpose that the Minister sees the Northwest Territories sugar tax serving? That is, will it be a revenue-neutral tax where the savings are reinvested in health measures?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I am sure the Minister of Health and Social Services would like that. One of the reasons that we have decided that we want to do it, we actually already have a letter of support from the Dieticians of Canada with their 6,000 members across the country. I think they have 15 in Northwest Territories. They have provided us with some excellent starting points for our discussions on a sugar tax. We don't know yet about the revenue. These are details we have to work out. As we go into the process, I would be more than pleased to sit down with committee and get their input. Then we will work to put together a good product for the people of the Northwest Territories.

MS. GREEN: Does the Minister have any preliminary ideas about how he will engage members of the public during the exploration of imposing this tax?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: As I said before, we are early in the process, but an issue such as this, this is something that we would need to get a lot of input from committee and the public. As we go through the LPs and introduce an introduction of bills, the opportunity is going to be there for committee to take the bill on the road. We will ensure that we have a lot of good feedback and a good-quality product that we are able to present before the Legislative Assembly.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my new favourite

Minister when we can expect him to report back to us about the next steps, such as the introduction of the LP. Thank you.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my honourable friend from Yellowknife Centre. We are early in the process. We are just starting to put our plan together. As I said, we have already received some fantastic information from the Dieticians of Canada. I am sure we will be getting a lot more information. We will process a lot of this information. We will put a timeline together, and then we will work with committee on seeking their input on our timeline as we go forward.