

**ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**

**QUESTION 709-18(2): YELLOWKNIFE LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN**

**March 7, 2017**

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. One of our colleagues is fond of saying that the best form of income assistance is a job, but there are a substantial number of people, 1,700 people in Yellowknife who are working full-time but not earning enough to get themselves out of poverty. My question to the Minister is whether he is aware of the living wage movement and whether it is something he supports. Thank you.

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

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I am aware of the living wage movement. We were part of the oversight committee in the last government, when the report was brought forth to this House that resulted in looking at the minimum wage throughout the Northwest Territories. I am very glad to say that, in June of 2015, we increased the minimum wage from \$10 to \$12.50, and we also made a commitment that we will review that minimum wage every two years. So, Mr. Speaker, I understand where the Member is coming from. We do have the second-highest minimum wage in the country, only aside to Nunavut, but I do understand where the Member is going with this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you to the Minister for that. I just want to be clear that I am not talking about the minimum wage. I am talking about a different wage altogether. It's called a living wage, and it is calculated on a community-by-community basis according to the expenses that a family would have in that community, the level of taxation, the kinds of benefits and so on and so forth. So it's different in every place. It's not a minimum wage.

There are several ways that the government could support the living wage, such as providing funds to calculate the living wage in communities outside of Yellowknife. What is the living wage in Colville Lake? It would very interesting to know. Their food costs are much higher, but their accommodation costs are lower, so it would useful to have some funds to calculate the living wage in communities outside of Yellowknife and also to promote paying the living wage among employers because, after all, this is a systemic fix to poverty. Can the Minister commit to this action?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** I understand that the group that brought forward the reports and the study that was done in 2015 did receive funding from the Anti-Poverty Fund to conduct that research. It is up to the employers, though, if they want to put forth paying their employees on a living wage or the minimum wage. Some of the employers that do decide to pay a living wage do it for many reasons. One of them is possibly to keep employees for long periods of time rather than spending more money on training and recruitment, so it is up to the employers on what they want to do. They do have to pay a minimum wage, which is \$12.50, which we are currently going through a review.

Any families, whether they are families or individuals, that feel that they are not making enough money to meet their requirements for a living wage, we do also have a lot of programs within Housing, within Health and Social Services, within my department, the ECC, to help offset some of the costs.

**MS. GREEN:** The Minister is right. The initial amount of money to get this project going did come from the Anti-Poverty Fund. I want to stress again that this is a systemic solution to poverty that is fronted by businesses, not by government. Of course, government provides a lot of supports to people in poverty, but, if businesses could be persuaded of the benefits of paying a living wage, then people wouldn't need those social supports that are provided by the Minister's department. I am wondering if the Minister can see the relevance of investing in the living wage in order to help people get out of poverty for good?

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** We do understand that the high costs of living here in the Northwest Territories is very problematic, especially in some of our rural and remote communities. We did do a review of the minimum wage. I understand that the Member is referring to a report that talks about the living wage that was done in 2015. We are committed to reviewing the minimum wage. We also made an investment during this budget to work with industry and businesses to help work on our small community employment support program to help create jobs as well as to help subsidize wages for some of our residents that are looking for work. We are committed to looking at the minimum wage again. As I mentioned, we do have a lot of good social programs here within government to help offset some of those costs that the Member is referring to.

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

**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am drowning in the rising tide of the minimum wage, so let me finally ask the Minister: when will the minimum wage be reviewed again? Thank you.

**HON. ALFRED MOSES:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have a Minimum Wage Committee. I believe they met towards the end of 2016. They have met twice already in 2017. They have a couple of more meetings coming up. They are going to be looking at the data and the impact of what we did, increasing that minimum wage in June of 2015, and doing a review. Then they will be bringing recommendations to me, as Minister, and we will look at those recommendations. We will share it with committee and move on from there. So, right now, it's being conducted.