

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 795-18(2): ELIGIBILITY FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP PROGRAMS

May 31, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the NWT Housing Corporation. In the past, the Minister has stressed the belief that home ownership is the way for people to get housed without relying on public housing and to free up units for those who need them. Yet, with only 20 Yellowknife families taking up the offer of assisted home ownership in the last 10 years, this faith seems to be a little misplaced. Will the Minister now re-examine the home ownership program and find out how to increase the uptake? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I speak broadly that home ownership, in my belief, is a way for people to take more pride in their belongings and it is a goal that most people achieve towards from we leave our parents' house, I seriously believe that. However, I also recognize that one size does not fit all, and so we have to look at each community separately.

Within the smaller communities, it may be a better possibility. Within the capital city, the majority of our public housing units are actually in multi-dwelling buildings where a home ownership might not be as feasible. That is why I have committed to looking at a rent subsidy program, which might work better for people within market communities, certainly within our capital city. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister. In her general statements, the Minister has asserted that, relying on the shift to home ownership, the Housing Corporation is not adding to its housing stock. So there is still a problem of availability of housing in Yellowknife. There is not enough in any form. Will the Minister, as a result of her survey, consider taking the cap off of the housing inventory and try to get more resources to build additional homes or apartments?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: We are working diligently with the federal government as well, and CMHC has made an agreement to put a hold on the declining funding just for this year, but they have still stated that in 2038, those operating and maintenance monies will be gone. With that in effect, we have to look at ways that we can actually support our residents in the Northwest Territories in meeting their housing needs.

At this point, I am not looking at increasing our public housing units, but I do believe that the Rent Supplement Program for the City of Yellowknife would address that need. For example, if I build one house in Yellowknife and it costs me \$500,000; if I give people \$500 a month, \$6,000 a year, towards a rent supplement program, I can support hundreds of families versus one family in the same amount of money. So those are the areas that we are looking at. How do we make our resources go further versus expanding things that we have not figured out how to pay for yet.

MS. GREEN: Given that answer, then, is the Minister willing to provide a rent supplement for additional units -- since those units need not be owned; they could be rented -- to increase the availability of housing?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: The Rent Supplement Program will be exactly that. It will not be supplementing units that we already own within the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. They will be supplementing market rental units so that we can reach more lower-income families and individuals within our market communities.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is good news from the Minister. I finally want to talk about the federal budget in March. Ottawa announced a transfer of \$36 million to the NWT over 10 years to provide for more housing. That compares to \$240 million over 10 years in Nunavut. Why did we end up with the short end of the stick from Ottawa on housing? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am as confused as the Member in trying to understand why we got short-changed in the Northern Housing Strategy, and so I am actually flying down to Ottawa this Sunday to meet with the Minister responsible for the CMHC, Mr. Duclos. Mr. Duclos, right after the budget was released, did give me a call the next day and promised me that he would provide me a funding formula, because we do support our other territories; however, Nunavut has double of the amount of needs for housing and got eight times the funding. We are asking for an explanation for why we got short-changed within that funding, and also to advocate that we can access more housing monies as it comes out, because a lot of the money for Indigenous people is only on reserve, and we do not qualify for that funding. We are having a face-to-face meeting Monday to discuss all of the issues with the Northwest Territories and our feeling of needing more support from the federal government.