

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 815-18(2): CREATION OF A YELLOWKNIFE SOBERING CENTRE

June 2, 2017, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Committee of the Whole, we rolled the money for the sobering centre into the current year's spending because the money had not been spent last year. So it seems like a good time to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services for an update on creating a sobering centre in Yellowknife. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have been in the Assembly for a large number of years now, and this has been possibly one of the most frustrating files that I have worked on. Something that should be such a good news story has turned out to be quite a frustration. We had hoped we would have a location by now. We have had several locations that we thought we were very close on, and for a variety of reasons -- contaminations in buildings, inability to get leases -- we have not been able to get a firm location.

We have come up with a temporary solution that will be beginning shortly. We are looking at doing some joint releases with the City. I will not say what that is at this point in time, but I did share it with the Members. The Members did get an update by e-mail where we are, and I did indicate that we are working on a joint release with the City. At that point, I will be making it public to residents of Yellowknife in the North. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I thank the Minister for his answer. I understand that what he is working on now is a temporary solution. Could he please talk about what he is doing toward a long-term solution?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: We have to look at this in a short-, medium-, and long-term approach. We do have something in the works for the short term, which we hope to be announcing very shortly, in cooperation with the City, who has been a fantastic partner on this.

In the medium term, well, we have to put it in medium term because there is a longer plan in place. We have looked to acquire and put a hold on the downtown location, which is the Yellowknife Day Care at this point. They are vacating the building. The GNWT owns the building. That building does have to come down. We believe that that is a prime location for a sobering centre day shelter in the downtown core, but we will not be able to move onto that site for approximately two years, which means we have to come up with a medium-term solution.

For the medium-term solution, we are looking at a number of different properties in Yellowknife. We have got two that are possible. I would hate to say what those properties are because we have had lots of properties that got really close, almost to

the point where we were ready to do some retrofitting, and have failed at the last minute due to environmental remediation or other issues. So we have a short-term solution we are going to be announcing shortly. We are still looking for the medium-term, and we have a long-term plan for a future sobering centre day shelter here in Yellowknife.

MS. GREEN: Lots of good news in that answer. What I hear is that it is really the medium term now that presents problems. I am sure that this is a very high priority for you to provide continuity of service once the sobering centre opens. I know that this has been frustrating, that there have been a lot of setbacks. What kinds of new approaches can you take to try and work with landlords or repurpose GNWT-owned assets to find that medium-term solution?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Last time we talked about this in the House, I was inundated, thankfully, with just a large number of people saying, "Have you tried this building?" "Have you looked at that property?" "Have you followed up with?" The answer in most situations is, yes, we have looked at those properties. We've talked to those landlords. We've been looking for a solution.

There were a couple that were a little bit more difficult because it involved moving GNWT staff and re-profiling billing just as the Member has suggested. We are looking at some current GNWT space that we might have to take our staff out of and relocate. I'm not going to name those places at this point in time because we're still working on some of the details and there's another property that may be available. We're trying to ascertain whether or not that is something we can get on the medium-term basis.

I've made the mistake, Mr. Speaker, of saying we're close a couple of times on a medium-term solution, so I'm going to be cautious. I want to say that we're going to have something in place shortly. The only thing I can say for sure is we've got a short-term solution in place that we're going to announce shortly. That will take us to the end of September. We're really hoping we can find a medium-term solution because, as the Member has said, continuity on this is going to be critical.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'd like to thank the Minister for his response. In addition to the physical location of the sobering centre, could the Minister please review what kind of staffing and services will be available in that facility? Thank you.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Social Services has talked to the stakeholders. We have listened to the comments and suggestions from Members. We have put together a bit of a program design on how a sobering centre would operate here in the Northwest Territories and that has often driven the size of the location we need to have and how many beds we can support. So we already have that in place. I'm happy to share that with committee if committee is interested. I'm happy to come and have a conversation with committee and provide them with a bit of an update on where we are as far as programming.

We haven't been there to that point so far because we've been struggling to find a

location, but I'm happy to meet with committee at their request.