

Constituency Newsletter

Setting targets for women's participation in the Legislative Assembly

Women have been consistently under-represented in the Legislative Assembly and I am working hard to change that. I am one of only two women in the 18th Assembly, and the NWT has never had more than three women members at a time. During the winter sitting, all 19 members voted in favor of my motion to set targets for women's representation in the House. The targets are 20 per cent by 2023 (four members) and 30 per cent by 2027 (six members).

Why 30 per cent? The United Nations has determined that a minimum of at least 30 per cent women is needed before legislatures produce public policy representing women's concerns and before political institutions begin to change the way they do business. There are five jurisdictions in Canada with 30 per cent representation, including Yukon. Of course 50 per cent would be better, but 30 per cent is achievable. We are starting from just 10 per cent representation in the Legislative Assembly now.

The heart of the problem is getting women to run to become MLAs. In the last election, no women ran in 10 of the 19 ridings and, unfortunately, that

is typical. The more women who run, the more likelihood of being elected. Take the example of the Behchoko Community Government. Last year, 20 candidates ran for ten positions. More than half the candidates were women and eight got elected.

In my experience, women have to be talked into running for office. Many are concerned that they don't have what it takes. I find that women give more consideration to the toll that politics will take on their families, especially their children, when they will work long hours and may have to be away from home for weeks at a time. Women often worry about getting the money together to pay for a campaign.

These are valid concerns. The women's campaign schools attempt to address these barriers by having current and former women MLAs talk about their role and about their decisions to run. There is also practical advice on creating a message, fundraising and door knocking. I attended two schools this winter, one in Fort Simpson and the other in Yellowknife, along with Minister Caroline Cochrane. I am now working with a group of women on a mentoring

Constituency Meeting

The Legislative Assembly's spring session is May 24 to June 1.

Constituency Meeting

Wednesday May 23
Baker Centre 7 PM

Please come and share your issues and concerns.



Renald Chiasson from Mildred Hall School served as a page during the winter Assembly session.

initiative that builds on the schools to support women to make a plan and become candidates.

The motion that passed on International Women's Day asks members of this Legislative Assembly to work together and individually to promote women's leadership, encouraging women to take part in public debate, respond to requests for mentoring from women who want to become candidates for any level of government and to work to remove all the barriers women face in becoming candidates.

Equality won't happen by itself. What we have now is a target to reach and a deadline to reach it. My hope is that we will move from having the worst record to electing women to the Legislative Assembly to electing a critical mass of women in nine years. I am committed to making this change happen.



I'm convinced that the key to getting women into politics is to provide them information that addresses their concerns about what the job involves, what it costs to get elected and how to put a campaign together. The Status of Women campaign schools are the primer every woman candidate needs. I've presented at four workshops in communities across the NWT including this recent event in Yellowknife.

Focus on Standing Committee on Social Development

Reducing alcohol harm in our community

In 2015-16, more Canadians were hospitalized for the harmful effects of alcohol than for heart attacks. Go ahead and read that sentence again! Here in the NWT the rate of hospitalizations caused by alcohol is five times the national average, a rate that hasn't changed in over 10 years. It's time to begin a public conversation about preventing the harm alcohol does to our families, friends and communities.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information collected and reported on the hospitalization indicator. CIHI recommends three policy options to address this problem: reducing liquor store hours, increasing liquor costs (for example, wine is underpriced) and having physicians conduct a brief screening with their patients to spot harmful drinking patterns. The Minister of Health and Social Services committed to sharing this report with his colleagues and to consider what approaches might work in the NWT.

In the meantime, the minister has announced a delay in moving the day shelter and sobering center to its permanent location on 50th Street. The renovation contract has now been awarded and work is scheduled to be complete by autumn. Once these services have been relocated and settled, the minister has said he will begin discussions about the feasibility of a managed alcohol program for chronic alcoholics. I will continue to advocate for government to work toward a harm reduction approach in both policy development and service delivery.

Public Guardian caseload unmanageable

There is some good news about the Public Guardian's services: it's taking less time to process applications submitted for people who can't make their own health decisions because of intellectual disability, dementia and mental illness. The bad news is that the Public Guardian's caseload is now over 150 people. These people are some of the most vulnerable in society because of their disabilities. The Public Guardian needs to develop a relationship with these clients by meeting with them at

least once a year. The office doesn't have the capacity to make this happen. The Minister of Health and Social Services didn't offer any immediate relief but rather promised to make a business case for additional staff in the next operations budget.

Sharing personal financial information with the housing corporation

A recent ruling by the NWT Information and Privacy Commissioner directs the NWT Housing Corporation to give tenants choices for sharing their income information. The NWTHC required all tenants to sign consent forms that give the corporation direct access to their tax information. The ruling came in response to a complaint from a tenant who didn't want to provide NWTHC electronic access to his tax records. The Commissioner said he should have the opportunity to present a paper copy of his monthly income statements, as he had in the past. The Minister responsible for NWTHC said this ruling has been implemented.

The plan to reduce core housing need requires funding

The NWT Housing Corporation responded to my June 2016 motion in the House by presenting a plan to reduce core housing need by 2 per cent a year for the next four years. The plan, however, is sketchy, without a clear rationale for spending in 15 different program areas, or where the \$67 million total required is going to come from. The most significant housing problem in Yellowknife Centre is affordability. During the 2014 community survey, a total of 868 Yellowknife households reported they had an affordability problem, meaning they are spending more than 30 per cent of their gross income on housing. The minister's plan contemplates affordability relief for just 100 households. This plan will not serve the needs of those with affordability problems. I will continue to raise this issue with the new minister responsible for the Housing Corporation.



The three days of Yellowknife hearings by the national inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls provided a valuable listening experience for those of us who attended and an important forum for a conversation about family violence. I appreciate the strength it took for the women affected to tell their stories and I thank them. I was delighted that my former CBC colleague and respected elder Rassi Nashalik was invited to light and tend the traditional Inuit stone lamp, the qulliq.

From the Assembly

Aftermath of Junior Kindergarten

Introduction of junior kindergarten has had many positive results. The education department reports that 85 per cent of four-year-olds across the NWT are enrolled in JK, and they attend eight days out of 10. But there have been downsides. Funding continues to be a concern—especially the \$300,000 territory-wide shortfall for Aboriginal language and cultural programming. JK has pushed Yellowknife schools to maximum capacity, requiring portable classrooms at St. Joe's. Yellowknife's Montessori school has lost one class of kids and may lose another in the fall. Other early child development options are diminishing. JK has also forced the Aboriginal Head Start program to refocus its program on children ages 0 to 3. I'll continue to press the new minister to deal with these issues.

Still Waiting on Aurora College Decisions

The Education Minister took heat in the last session on the suspension of Aurora College's Social Work and Teacher Education Programs. Last fall, he announced the launch of a "foundational review" of the college to gather data for recommendations on its future. Then, he fired the Aurora College Board, losing their expertise for the review. We're now waiting for the final report and its recommendations. We are also waiting for a separate review of the social work program which will identify reasons student completion of the program is low. I look forward to working with the new minister, but we need answers for all students planning to attend post-secondary education in the territory.

Cannabis Education for Youth and Parents

Cannabis legalization is just months away and we must be ready for the impacts, especially on our youth. NWT residents are engaged in this issue: one in 10 households took part in the online consultations on what legalization will look like in the north. Most said they want government to prioritize spending on public awareness and education focused on youth. We need ads in mass media, social media, posters, pamphlets, and mandatory education in schools. Teachers have a lead role, but the most important talk will be between parents and kids. I'm pressed the government to provide tips on approaches and messages for parents having those discussions using the Cannabis Talk Kit from Drug Free Kids

Canada. As a result, the kit is being mailed to 13,000 households across the territory starting next month, and the government is launching the other elements I suggested for a multi-media campaign.

Living Wage

Paying workers a "living wage" starts from the principle that if you're working full-time, you should be able to afford your most basic living expenses.. So while the GNWT increased the minimum wage from \$11.25 to \$13.46 on April 1, that isn't near enough to

meeting the actual costs of living in Yellowknife. According to an accepted national calculation, the living wage for Yellowknife is \$20.96 per hour for a family of four. (Note the figure announced in November has changed because of the inclusion of new federal tax information.) Costs for other NWT communities can only be higher. There are great benefits for employers as well as workers in paying a living wage, but we need data to move towards this goal. I'm pushing for territory-wide data collection so we can expand the living wage calculation.



The Mildred Hall School Peacemakers joined students from other city schools at the Legislative Assembly on Anti Bullying Day, February 28. Thanks to Wendy Wile and her students for participating in this important event.



I heard citizens' opinions and concerns on the introduction of legalized cannabis during Committee hearings that took place in fifteen communities plus Yellowknife. The bill will be debated when the House resumes May 24th.

Excerpt from my Reply to the Budget Address

Falling Revenue Is Not Inevitable: Let's Do a Rethink

At the beginning of this Assembly's term, the Finance Minister said there would be two years of program cuts and layoffs to make money available for capital projects, such as roads. He followed through with two budgets of restraint, cutting \$100 million, and issued layoff notices to about 100 people.

This year, he was supposed to keep his promise for increased program spending in the final two years of the term. That hasn't happened. He says that revenue is down this year, and expected to drop by more than \$50 million in the next fiscal year. Corporate income tax is down, and falling \$30 million more next year; personal income tax is down by 25 per cent. A 2016 Revenue Options paper examined how much money various options would raise, the impact they would have on the economy, and the principles of a predictable, fair, and simple tax policy. But there's been no action from that analysis.

What can we do to increase revenue? There's the federal finance formula, but it does not encourage the GNWT to increase its own-source revenues. If we grow our own source revenues, the federal transfer goes down, so there's no incentive there.

But there are other options. A tax bracket for high individual income earners, an increase in the payroll tax, an increase in corporate tax and definitely an increase in royalties: these are all options. The 2016 paper dismisses all of these options because they would increase the cost of living, the cost of doing business, and generally make the NWT a less desirable place to live and work. But there is no evidence to support this conclusion.

A report commissioned by the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment concludes there is "a significant opportunity for the NWT to benefit more from mining." The report says our take on mineral resources is among the lowest in the world because of generous deductions on royalties and corporate taxes along with lax oversight of tax avoidance. In short, we could and should be benefiting more from mining in the NWT. That doesn't mean we don't promote mining at the same time, by

increasing incentives for exploration and expediting land rights negotiations for land certainty.

Yet the government says now is not the time to revisit royalties, even though the minister is developing a new *Mineral Resources Act*. Instead, he would like to delay this discussion until the mines begin to close. This situation is totally unacceptable. We have one chance to benefit from the sale of our non-renewable resource heritage, and that time is now.

Instead of having the Minister tell residents that all opportunities to increase revenue will not work, he needs to engage Northerners face-to-face to find solutions to this ongoing problem, using the 2016 Revenue Options paper as a starting point. Then we need to debate these options in the Assembly and agree on decisions for a progressive tax regime that provides increased revenues while preserving investment.



A new radio station started broadcasting to the world online when Yellowknife's *Cabin Radio* signed on from the heart of Yellowknife Centre March 5.

I joined programming and news leader Ollie Williams (centre) and morning show host, Jesse Wheeler for the launch. The station has given itself a strong mandate to promote northern music and the arts, as well as providing training for youth and community radio stations. Take a listen. You'll find them at www.cabinradio.ca.

Your Input is Important

I need to know what you think and what actions you want to see.

Julie Green

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