

MLA urges GNWT to ditch carbon tax

Cory Vanthuyne says cost of living 'motivation enough' to reduce fossil fuel consumption

by Avery Zingel

Northern News Services

As the GNWT awaits clarity from Ottawa on carbon pricing, the territories and provinces are "facing a mess that is derailing more and more each passing week," according to Yellowknife North MLA Cory Vanthuyne.

"(Carbon pricing) is going to move money from your left pocket to your right pocket. Simply put, it's a wash," he said in the Legislative Assembly Oct. 12, urging the GNWT to join Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba in opposing the federal plan.

"Let's join the rest of Canada and get off this sinking ship called the carbon tax," he said.

Vanthuyne asked the government to promote incentive-based measures to support Northern residents, businesses and the environment and said the cost of living in the North is "motivation enough" to deter Northerners from consuming fossil fuels.

The GNWT hasn't signed

on to carbon pricing just yet but has an memorandum of understanding in the final drafting stages, said Finance Minister Robert C. McLeod.

While the GNWT initially opposed carbon pricing because it would have had a "detrimental effect" on people in the NWT, McLeod says the GNWT changed its stance when it realized the federal government was going to proceed with imposing carbon pricing despite the territory's stance.

The GNWT created its own approach, he said, to avoid the federal government imposing its default carbon tax regime, or "backstop," which will be used in jurisdictions that don't create their own system.

Vanthuyne said the GNWT's plan wouldn't be strong enough to cause real change.

"The 'made in the North' carbon pricing appears to be a pointless, symbolic gesture that will cost our government a lot of money to administer but will do very little for the

world's climate," he said.

Carbon pricing is "designed to help consumers and business to transition off fossil fuels and to transition towards less carbon intensive sources of energy," said Craig Scott, executive director of Ecology North.

'Elegant and simple solution'

"Economists almost all agree that this is the most elegant and simple solution to do this," said Scott.

One of the earliest adopters of carbon pricing was Sweden.

Today they price carbon at \$164 per tonne, but started at \$10 per tonne in the 1990s. As a result, individual Swedes emit around 18 per cent of Canada's per capita emissions.

"Now they're one of the leaders in electric vehicles, biomass heating and effective use of waste," said Scott.

The territorial carbon pricing regime offers a rebate on heating fuel and will tax transportation fuel, with an exemption for aviation.

It will also create a rebate program for heavy emitters to encourage investments to reduce GHG emissions.

Residents will see a line on their bill that includes a rebate for heating fuel, propane and heating oil.

Carbon pricing will be determined on an intensity basis as of July 1, 2019 based on a \$20 per tonne of GHG emissions, increasing annually to a \$50 per tonne ceiling.

Changes to the Income Tax Act will introduce benefits to offset the impact of carbon pricing on the cost of living. The benefits will increase with the price of carbon and neutralize 100 per cent of the carbon tax for heating fuel for most residents, businesses and governments.

Fully implemented, the benefit will give \$260 annually for each NWT resident 18 years and older and \$300 per child under 18.

"The average person in the NWT is going to be better off, they're going to have more money in their pocket when

this is instituted," said Scott.

There will be "winners and losers," he said. People with big families and low emissions will have more money, while people who are heavy emitters and drive big trucks or idle "might not have as much money in the end."

Scott said the increase at the pumps could be around 2.7 cents per litre.

The NWT spends generously on fuel imports and carbon pricing could encourage businesses to decrease their emissions to save money, said Scott.

"Do we want to continue to spend our hard earned dollars in Alberta and the U.S. to import fossil fuels or do we want to spend that money to build an economy around green energy and green jobs in the NWT?" he said.

The federal government will institute its carbon pricing regime next year, pricing each tonne of emissions at a \$10 minimum. The carbon price will increase by \$10 annually until 2022, where the target



CORY VANTHUYNE: is concerned that the GNWT's "made in the North" carbon regime will not be effective.

price will be \$50 per tonne.

McLeod said the GNWT has used carbon tax discussion to leverage funding for transitional projects in the NWT that will reduce emissions.

Revenues from the tax are earmarked for green projects across the territory, including those outlined in the GNWT's 2030 Energy Plan, totalling more than \$40-million over five years.

Northern News Services

MLAs press education minister on social work program

As the Department of Education, Culture and Employment waits to fill its associate deputy minister position with an expert, the Aurora College social work program remains in limbo.

In the legislative assembly Oct. 15, MLAs Julie Green and Kieron Testart grilled Education Minister Caroline Cochrane about why the GNWT cut funding despite the programs inherent value.

Until the department hires an associate deputy minister (ADM) for post-secondary renewal, the department cannot make any decisions on the Aurora College Foundational Review or the social work program, said Cochrane.

In the 15-year forecast for needs in the territory, social work is in the top 10, said Cochrane.

"We need to have those programs. We would not offer a program that was not up to par," she said.

No matter the result, Cochrane wants a "real campus and polytechnic," she said.

The call for a new ADM closes at the end of this month, with a new hire set for the end of 2019, said Cochrane.

Green asked Cochrane if the department of education will use the foundational review to start making course offerings for a new polytechnic institution.

Green fired back at the minister's answer, stating that the hiring of an expert shouldn't stand in the way of the college's short-term preservation.

It would not be "appropriate" for a minister without the expertise to develop post-secondary education to design Aurora College, said Cochrane.

"My degree is in social work. It is not on running post-secondary education. I need the expertise," said Cochrane.

One of three instructors has already departed the college and there are a handful of students completing the program, said Green.

NEWS FROM legislative assembly

by Avery Zingel

email: editorial@nnsi.com



"I regret that the minister has had a full glass of mumbo-jumbo for lunch and we are not getting anywhere with trying to understand how to preserve the strengths of this program within the time that is still allotted to it," said Green.

Cochrane could not say who would be left in the social work program by next year but that she is "not willing to let Aurora College stay status quo," she said.

The external review shared earlier this month by Green, who obtained it through an access to information request, directly contradicts the GNWT's move to cut funding, she said.

"I believe that one of the reasons this review has not been made public is because it contradicts the government's line. The review shows the program is worthwhile. It should never have been cut. Instead, it must be redeveloped to improve student success," said Green.

While the program flounders, Green is asking Cochrane what the department will do to protect the program until it hires an expert decision maker.

The program is dying a "slow death" despite its strengths, including meeting requirements for licenced social workers and training students who are from the region they will be working in after graduation, said Green.

At an Oct. 4 constituency meeting for Frame Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly, Cochrane fielded questions from residents who were concerned about the future of Aurora College.

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NEWS in Brief

No new rules for MED officers and cannabis consumption

Municipal Enforcement Division officers won't be bound by any new restrictions for off-duty cannabis use following legalization, according to the City of Yellowknife.

"MED has not issued any rules or regulations for its employees regarding the use of cannabis prior to reporting for work," stated city spokesperson Iman Kassam in an email.

Instead, the same pre-legalization rules remain the status quo for MED officers -- and all city employees.

"The city deals with this issue in the same manner regarding the use of any substance which can cause impairment for all of its employees," stated Kassam.

"That is to report in a condition suitable for performing the duties prescribed for your job in a safe and proper manner."

The city will "always look to reasonably accommodate any staff whose ability to perform the normal requirements of their job may be affected by a medical condition or its treatment."

While policies remained unchanged for MED officers, the RCMP recently introduced new regulations for its members. Yellowknife Mounties and their counterparts across the country, cannot consume cannabis within 28 days of reporting to work.

The force cites safety concerns and a lack of data on the drug's effect on performance as justification for the new regulations.

— Brendan Burke

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From protest to celebration

Local pot activist looks to new era of legalization

by Simon Whitehouse
Northern News Services

After nearly a decade of fighting for legalized marijuana, Kim MacNearney is finally moving from protest mode to celebration mode as the drug became available in the North, Oct. 17.

Yellowknifer spotted MacNearney at the Liquor Shop, the sole retail distributor for Yellowknife after a \$26.66 purchase of pre-rolled cannabis. After the purchase Wednesday, MacNearney went to the legislative assembly to listen to MLAs speak to the issue before hanging out downtown to wish people happy legalization day.

"I feel amazing and I think it is like a dream," she said happily. "I can't even believe it is reality. I didn't think the day would come and that it just would be a medical push for a long time. To be fully legal, I didn't expect that. It is the end of an amazing push by lots of people."

MacNearney has been a leading advocate for legalized cannabis since she and her husband Craig were charged for growing multiple pot plants at their home in 2009. The couple were convicted in 2014 of growing marijuana. Since then, she has become the poster person locally for the push to end prohibition. She has been known for heading the annual 4/20 protest since 2012 and starting her own marijuana consultation business called Beyond 420.

She doesn't hold grudges from her experience, but looking back, she is appreciative that the change did eventually come.

"To be persecuted for something so intensely and then to finally have a societal switch. I almost want to be like – 'I told

you that it wasn't that bad' or 'You treated me like a dirtbag and it wasn't that bad.' "The other part of me is not quite an 'I told you so,' because I'm just glad that no one ever has to go through what I went through."

MacNearney said as an activist, she has tried to be as positive as possible and has been slow to criticize as the GNWT worked through the process of legalizing the drug. Even at the Liquor Shop, she noted the price was on the high end, but stated that she was likely paying a price that reflected the quality of the product.

Important to be aware of 'bigger picture'

"I've really noticed people being negative about it, whether it is the general public or activists, people are picking it apart," she said, noting for example, complaints about how much one can grow or carry. She admits she is also critical of some of the fines and jail time that is included, however, she said being aware of the bigger picture is important.

"I am not going to let that cast a shadow on the fact we are in the middle of a massive fundamental shift with regards to cannabis, prohibition and cannabis awareness," she said. "There is no away around that because prohibition is never good."

MacNearney is looking forward to the implications of legalization which include growing business opportunities and less apprehension among medical users about trying it for medicinal therapy.

"(Removing that stigma) is probably the biggest thing because people who have been curious about its potential medical benefits will be far more willing to come out and try



Dylan Short/NNSL photo

Kim MacNearney stands outside the uptown Liquor Shop on Oct. 17 – the day of legalization of cannabis across Canada. The leading pot activist purchased the newly available product at Yellowknife's only retail distributor and celebrated during the day by wishing the general public a happy legalization day.

it. At its base, it is a plant that has medicinal qualities."

She also notes that with the acceptance of cannabis for recreational users, it will allow

for a professionalization of its sale, with specialists being able to freely communicate the best types of marijuana to suit specific needs.

– with files from Dylan Short

MLAs press, from page 4

Students are flunking out because they are unable to take university level elective courses in Yellowknife, Cochrane acknowledged.

She said the review was very "negative focused" during that meeting.

It should be redeveloped as a bachelor of social work degree, which would ameliorate the challenges students face in taking third and fourth-year courses in their first year of university.

Moving Aurora into a polytechnic university would not mean "becoming all to everyone" and quality programming is a must, said Cochrane.

A future for Aurora College must establish an "identity" for those who attend and specialize in transferable and recognizable credentials, she said.

– Avery Zingel

Sobering centre could pilot managed alcohol program

A managed alcohol pilot program could be considered by the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) as early as one year into the Yellowknife sobering centre's opening.

The centre is a "huge and welcome shift" to serving the downtown population, said MLA Julie Green in the legislative assembly Oct. 16. The new facility is "more than just a place out of the cold," she said.

Its expanded services for bathrooms, showers and laundry as well as access to health and social services are a shift to help those living with addictions.

Partnerships with the city's street outreach, RCMP and the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation all converge in the new facility.

"All of this flows from an understanding that our fellow citizens are suffering and that non-judgmental support can reduce the harms of addictions, poverty and homelessness," said Green.

Intoxication in the downtown core is a common public concern, said Green, adding that the shelter is not the source of these problems.

"Services must be offered where clients are found," she said.

Green congratulated Minister Glen Abernethy for "championing" the need for improved resources that are difficult to find.

She asked whether HSS would consider a managed alcohol program during this assembly.

Abernethy is "committed" to having HSS explore a possible managed alcohol program pilot at least one year after the shelter first opened.

"We have seen that the managed alcohol program does work in other jurisdictions. I had an opportunity to visit a managed alcohol program in Ottawa which is getting some really great results," said Abernethy.

Additional staff on site connect clients with healing, anger management and information on healthy relationships.

JULIE GREEN
MLA YK Centre

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Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Green asked how the department will continue to monitor the effectiveness and delivery of the new centre as a harm reduction measure.

HSS contracted NWT Disabilities Council to track individuals using the service and the value of services people expect and need. The Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation is using the program space to offer programming.

Green asked for additional funding to the Common Ground litter pick up program to address increased littering in the area.

Abernethy said he was unsure of the financial situation of the program, but acknowledged its value and said he was willing to explore continuing the program.

– Avery Zingel

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Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

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