

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 436-18(3): FAMILY VIOLENCE CRISIS FUNDING

October 24, 2018

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. The report I mentioned in my statement today reported to a Ministerial committee on spousal assault in the Assembly of the day in 1985. This committee brought together a wide range of service providers, officials from government departments, the Status of Women, and others whose work included family violence. What would it take for this Minister to treat this crisis as a crisis and re-establish this coordinated approach to the issue? Mahsi.

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

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was 14 when that report came out. We recognize that family violence is a crisis and is of incredible importance here, in the Northwest Territories. In Cabinet, we have established different committees of Cabinet to focus in on some of the challenges that we face here, in the Northwest Territories. We do have a social envelope committee of Cabinet that does look at this issue and look at how we can work better as departments to address those issues. I'm not convinced that right now we need to stand up a new committee, but I do hear the Member, and I will certainly ask the departments to go back and look at what was done in the past, and whether or not there is value in re-establishing a committee like that, or whether or not we can do those things through our existing social envelope committee of Cabinet.

MS. GREEN: The Minister can find the report in the library, or I can lend him my copy, and he can have a read of it. What I hear him saying is that he's going to create an echo chamber of government departments speaking to one another rather than consulting with people who are front-line service providers or who have a stake in this system as victims, as batterers, and so on. Why can't this work include a broader array of people than simply having people within government talk to one another?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: We have a positive working relationship with the Y, with the Shelter Network, with the Status of Women, who are all working with us closely to create awareness and work to help reduce and hopefully eliminate family violence here, in the Northwest Territories. We take their input. We have reviewed reports. Recently, a report came out in 2017 from shelter executive directors. We aren't in an echo chamber. I appreciate the Member's pessimism, but we believe this is important. We are working on this. We are working closely with our partners, and we continue to do so.

MS. GREEN: This work is so important that, in the last three years, the budget has increased by 5 per cent or \$172,000. On what basis is the Minister treating this crisis as a crisis?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: I just want to make one quick correction. The research that I was referring to was actually conducted by the Aurora Research Institute, and it exam-

ined the responses to intimate-partner violence in the Northwest Territories.

With respect to funding, the Member knows how this Assembly works. They know that we have to go through a business planning process, and we have to make a business case for increasing funds. I am proposing that we increase some funding here to the shelters here, in the Northwest Territories, through the next budgeting cycle.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the barges are in crisis, there is money to be found immediately, and the problem is on its way to resolution. Now that we are in the fourth year of this Assembly, the Minister is making a business case for more resources for family violence. I can't say it's too little, too late. Everything is appreciated, but the fact is that this area needs serious attention. It needs new initiatives, and I'm looking for a commitment for the Minister of action, not just talking. Is he able to make that commitment? Mahsi.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: To address family violence is going to take a community. It's going to take multiple departments. The Department of Justice is doing a number of things, as is the Department of Health and Social Services. Education is doing things as far as educating youth. The Department of Health and Social Services alone is spending \$2.9 million dollars to fund shelters. We recognize, through work that we've done with them, that this isn't enough, so we will be proposing some increases in that area. On top of that, the Department of Health and Social Services alone spends another \$477,000 to support different campaigns like What Will it Take?; different programs like the non-shelter regional protocols teams have been set up, that's \$210,000; programs for children who witness violence, \$75,000; Territorial Family Violence Shelter Network on top of what we give them, there's another \$100,000; and the Family Violence Awareness week is \$10,000. I'd hardly say we're doing nothing. I agree we need to do more, and we're committed to doing that, and we will be discussing that through the next budget cycle. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.