

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 474-18(3): POVERTY IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

October 29, 2018

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can he tell us how the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy will impact poverty in the NWT? Can he estimate how many people will move out of poverty by 2020? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is a federal government strategy, so I can't say exactly how many people the federal government strategy might move out of poverty, but I can talk a little bit about the work that we are doing with the federal government.

As the Member has already indicated, the federal government's poverty reduction strategy sets out an official measure of poverty for Canada using the market basket measure. They are actually going to change it and call it "Canada's official poverty line." The market basket measure is a measure, as the Member, I'm certain, is aware, through the Canadian Income Survey, which has traditionally excluded the Northwest Territories.

I was happy to see that the new strategy actually commits to extending the Canada Income Survey so that the poverty line can be measured and reported in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, and Nunavut. I'm happy to say that Statistics Canada has already initiated a review of the market basket measure which will be completed by the end of the 2018-2019 fiscal review. Their review will include consideration of the unique cost of living in the northern territories, with the possibility that the market basket measure will be tailored, hopefully tailored, to reflect northern realities.

I'm happy to say that the Bureau of Statistics; Education, Culture, and Employment; and Health and Social Services are participating in that review. In fact, we have staff in Ottawa this week participating in some workshops around this.

We are hoping, Mr. Speaker, or we are intending that, in next week's anti-poverty roundtable, there will a presentation on the Canada Poverty Reduction Strategy delivered by representatives from Employment and Social Development Canada. There is a session on the development of the northern market basket measures that will also be held. I think this is a going to be an important discussion. It's going to be led by the Bureau of Statistics with input from Statistics Canada.

Mr. Speaker, we are hopeful that the northern basket will be implemented following the review. If it is not, it is still going to be a benefit for the Northwest Territories to be included in the Canadian Income Survey and the national reporting on the official poverty line. This will allow us in the Northwest Territories to measure progress in reducing poverty against other jurisdictions, as well as national results. The NWT has established, as the Member knows, 23 of our own indicators that we are using to assess poverty here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate that response. The Minister said there is a presentation next week at the anti-poverty roundtable on the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy. Can he not tell us what impact this strategy will have on the NWT, as apparently the analysis has been done?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: In the strategy, the federal government is encouraging provinces and territories to live up to the principles of their plan by doing different actions and activities in the Northwest Territories. These actually, I think, in many ways are similar to the territorial Anti-Poverty Action Plan, as it summarizes existing programs and funding commitments across the government, as well as with our partners throughout the Northwest Territories.

Once again, I am not the right person to talk about the federal plan. I am looking forward to seeing the presentation and working with our partners from across the Northwest Territories to continue addressing poverty here in the Northwest Territories.

MS. GREEN: Indicators are not measurements of poverty. They are indicators. It is something different. The indicators for food security shows that we have a pretty significant level of people who describe themselves as having moderate to severe food insecurity. Can the Minister tell us how the anti-poverty initiatives and funding in the NWT are made? Any improvement in this area?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The Government of the Northwest Territories is taking a whole-of-government approach when it comes to addressing poverty. Housing is doing an important thing. Income support is doing important things, as the Member highlighted within her Member's statement. ITI is doing important things. ENR. The government is working to create and support community gardens in every community in the Northwest Territories. The anti-poverty fund has also put money into different food programs throughout the Northwest Territories.

The federal government, obviously, has a role to play. We're hoping to see some positive results from the review of the food mail program. These are things that will help control costs, bring fresh produce, fresh products, to the Northwest Territories.

In the agricultural strategy, the Department of Health and Social Services is working to remove barriers so that individuals who are growing their own produce can sell it. That's our first step under that strategy. Our second step is to allow the sale of locally harvested foods and farm foods, so that these foods can be made available at a local level, and in a safe way.