

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

**QUESTION 520-18(3):
CONSULTATION ON SUGAR-SWEETENED DRINKS TAX
February 7, 2019**

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance. In my statement, I spoke about the cynical box-ticking exercise that the Minister has undertaken to engage NWT residents on the question of a sugary-drink tax. My question for him is: why is consultation happening now, when your only remaining budget has already been tabled? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Finance.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, respectful of the process that this Assembly undertakes, we have decided that we are going to go out for a consultation like we normally do when we are presenting these types of new initiatives and get feedback from the public, which we take very seriously, and that will give us an indication of where we need to go moving forward.

MS. GREEN: My question is why the consultation on this issue is happening now, when there are no more budgets to come in this Assembly.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Regardless if there is any budget coming forward or not, we still need to do the consultation because what people out there say is very important to us, budget or no budget session anymore.

MS. GREEN: My next question is: what is the end result of this consultation going to look like, then? Is it going to be something that is added in a supplementary appropriation? Is it a recommendation to the 19th Assembly? What's the point?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I wish I knew what the future of this particular consultation would look like. I would buy lottery tickets for tomorrow. The work needs to be done and, much like the work with the formula financing a couple of Assemblies ago, that was going to be quite an undertaking, so it was decided that they would do the work before the end of the Assembly to determine exactly what the gap was and how it might be utilized going forward. So that work was done, and I see that as this, as well. We will do the work now. There will be an opportunity to, if the work is done quickly enough, maybe come forward with the request. We do not know that until we hear back from the people of the Northwest Territories. Having failed that, then it may be a recommendation to the 19th Assembly, but we won't know until we hear from the people and we can conclude the consultation.

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

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my last question is: what efforts is the Minister going to make to engage residents of the Northwest Territories by giving some profile to this consultation on the Department of Finance website?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: I take the Member's point. I will follow up and ensure that

this is given the attention that it should be getting. I do know from being in a couple of places that there were some signs going up in the communities as to consultations that were happening there. I have seen some early indication of some of the consultations that are going on in the communities, some of the comments that were coming out. Obviously, they were in the paper, and because you mention the word "tax," everybody always says, "Well, I am opposed to any type of new tax." We will always have comments like that, but this is a consultation. We are very interested in hearing what the public has to say, and then we will put a plan together going forward. I take the Member's point, in response to her question. I will follow up and make sure that this is given the attention that it deserves. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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