

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 715-18(3): CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

May 24, 2019

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are also on the climate, and they are addressed to the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Given the recent scientific studies about the rate of change, the accelerated change of the climate, it is now being referred to as a crisis. Does the Minister consider the current state of affairs, with the warming of the planet, a crisis? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stated before, we have seen the effects of climate change, especially up in the Beau-Del, long before the rest of the country, and I do believe that we are getting to the point where it is becoming a crisis. We see that. I have said before that, in the Delta, we see ground falling into the water. You look around in the Beaufort and Tuktoyaktuk at the erosion on the shore there; that demonstrates the effect that climate change is having on the North. We recognize that.

The short answer to the Member's question is: yes, I do believe that this is serious enough to be considered a crisis. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that response. During the consultation on the 2030 NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework, some people suggested that the GNWT create a climate change secretariat, such as exists in both Yukon and Nunavut, to oversee all climate crisis-related work, rather than compartmentalizing responsibilities in one department. Why did government decide to not take this advice?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Through a jurisdictional review of the climate change programs in Canadian jurisdictions, ENR found that, regardless of the organizational structure, the most important factors in their success were leadership and the authority to act. The GNWT, we believe, has accordingly taken a leadership role on climate change in the territories and organized itself so that climate change is considered at all levels of authority. As the Premier has stated before, at the director level, the ADM, DM, and ministerial committees have been established, and the leadership structure will focus government efforts to implement and report on the Climate Change Strategic Framework and to assist with the development and implementation of the 2019-2023 action plan. We also recognize the importance of working with our partners as we move to the implementation phase of the Climate Change Strategic Framework. To this end, ENR, we are actually exploring opportunities, approaches to coordinate the guidance work, such as through the establishment of a climate change advisory body.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the answer. I guess I would prefer to see a somewhat independent office looking out for climate change rather than having the government do this directly. I feel that the results may be more credible, but it is what it is, I guess, at this point. I mentioned in my statement about taking a whole-of-government approach to procurement, screening it for how it is mitigating or making worse the issue of climate

crisis, and I am wondering if the government is prepared to institute a whole-of-government procurement policy that takes this full-cost accounting into account.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: That is a very timely question. The GNWT recognizes the importance that our government can play on influencing the market for the goods and services that we procure. Following engagement conducted in 2017-2018, ENR worked closely with the communities on the development of an NWT waste resource management strategy. The strategy is anticipated to be released in the coming month. As part of this strategy, goal number four focused on actions to greening government. Greening government means making decisions about what we buy, how we manage our assets, how we run our business to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, energy, water, and solid waste.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like this waste strategy may go some of the way towards answering this question. My final question is whether the government has any interest in reviving a program such as the One-Tonne Challenge that focuses on personal action and accountability. Does the government have any interest in drawing citizens individually into this, beyond taxing them with the carbon tax?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Again, we know the crisis that we are in with climate change, and I think the public is becoming more and more educated as we become more and more educated. Our youth are taking steps to become more and more educated, and I think, through that process, there will be a lot of people doing that on their own, reducing their carbon footprint and how they do business. If it's an initiative that could help us address the situation that we are in, then I think it's incumbent on this Assembly. I say "this government." When I talk about the government, I am talking all 19 Members. It's something that this Assembly can look at and possibly get behind and promote and see if we can make that initiative come to be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.