

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 88-19(2): ALCOHOL STRATEGY

February 26, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have spoken several times in this House about the harm that alcohol does to the people of the Northwest Territories. We spend a fortune on the effects of alcohol abuse without ever addressing the elephant in the room, which is alcohol itself. Alcohol touches every part of our lives, whether we drink or not. With this in mind, I was delighted to discover that the Department of Health and Social Services has started preliminary work on an alcohol strategy. My question for the Minister is: what does she want an alcohol strategy to accomplish? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Minister for Health and Social Services.

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry, things are dropping all around here. The Member has asked about the alcohol strategy, and our department has put a tender out for the development of a territorial alcohol strategy. This is basically preliminary research on a procurement of shared services to develop a territorial alcohol strategy, and presumably it would fit within it. We're trying to get a background on information that would help us develop a strategy. We are right now in the process doing the tender process.

MS. GREEN: I recognize that the Minister had a flurry of action around her when I asked my question, and I don't think she heard what I said. I am asking a much more general question, which is: what does she want an alcohol strategy to accomplish?

HON. DIANE THOM: The overall approach from the department is to be able to have a scan of what are some of the alcohol, you know, the department realizes that we need to reduce the prevalence and impacts of addiction in the Northwest Territories. That is one of the things we would like to have a look at. Also, the territorial government had a territorial committee on problematic substance abuse, and this was just established in January. The mandate is to develop a comprehensive response to the ongoing issues related to substance in the Northwest Territories. That's why the department is looking at an alcohol strategy.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. My next question is about how the strategy is going to be created, and who will be involved in the work to create this. Is this a multi-party drafting proposition, or is the department going to draft the whole thing itself?

HON. DIANE THOM: The territorial committee on problematic substance abuse allows the GNWT to address harms of alcohol abuse, as well as other substances. The territorial committee on problematic substance abuse will report to the deputy ministers, given the interdepartmental structure. The membership of the territorial committee will consist of representatives from the Department of Health and Social Services; the Department of Justice; the Department of Education, Culture and Employment; the Department of Finance; the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority; the Tlicho Service Agency; the Office of the Chief Coroner; the RCMP; the Workers Safety Compensation Commission; and the NWT Association of Communities.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not having much luck today, but I'm going to press on. The preliminary work on the alcohol strategy is going to be finished, and I'm not totally sure who is going to create the alcohol strategy proper. My last question is really about timing. When does the Minister expect to have the alcohol strategy completed?

HON. DIANE THOM: I can get back to the Member with the timelines. We have a tender currently out in RFP, so I can get back to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.