

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFECENTRE

QUESTION 108-19(2): ALCOHOL STRATEGY

February 27, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. In my statement today, I spoke about the work that the Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation project, or CAPE, has done to look at ways to reduce alcohol harm. CAPE identified a group of best practices, and I wonder for the Minister could tell us what role, if any, the GNWT had in developing this work. Thank you.

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

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member. I was able to print out the CAPE report. Unfortunately, the Northwest Territories scored very low. We only have 33 percent. As part of the report, it came under 11 policy domains. I want to speak a little bit about the report, because it is very disturbing, and it is something that our department needs to improve on. I do want to talk about some of the things that we are doing.

In 2016, the GNWT created an opioid task force, and recently, under the mandate, the task force group has been expanded to include alcohol and drugs. That is one part of it. Last month, the group renamed as the territorial committee on problematic substances. Its mandate is to develop a comprehensive response to the ongoing issues related to substance abuse in the Northwest Territories. One of the deliverables for the Northwest Territories will be in the form of a whole-of government alcohol strategy. It has already been identified in the CAPE, as it is an evidence-based review, as having a specific territorial strategy to discuss alcohol-related harms in a coordinated approach that will have a measurable impact. The whole-of government approach is 11 policy domains, as I mentioned, as part of the CAPE report, and many of them fall just outside of the Health and Social Services, hence the importance of having a territorial approach. The plan is for the committee to report to the chair of the deputy minister's committee on child and family. As this is an inaugural meeting, it was identified to the committee that the development of an alcohol strategy would require community input through active engagement and determine the scope of work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister was able to share some good information there. I just wondered, in particular, to repeat my first question, what role the GNWT played in the development of the CAPE report.

HON. DIANE THOM: Yesterday, I mentioned that there was a research RFP out. This is a preliminary research and discussion paper towards the development of an NWT alcohol strategy and was recently tendered. The results of this discussion paper will be presented in the full-day workshop that is held next month, March 12th, at the Chief Drygeese Centre. The purpose of that workshop is to set the direction for a whole-of-government approach towards the development of an NWT strategy. This will be led by our Department of Health and Social Services. The next step during that process is to be able to talk about the CAPE report, as there were recommendations under the 11 domains.

MS. GREEN: I am going to give up on that question, and I am going to go on now to the failing grade the Minister has referenced, that we got a failing grade, as most jurisdictions did. What are the barriers that government is facing right now to developing better alcohol policies, as outlined in the CAPE report?

HON. DIANE THOM: There are a lot of barriers as a result of this report. I mean, it basically told us we are failing under the Canadian Alcohol Policy Evaluation. Our department is working with and receiving funding from Indigenous Services Canada so that we can support this problematic substance abuse, and we are looking at hiring a special advisor for this substance abuse. We will continue to be tasked with looking and coordinating the alcohol strategy in the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At times in the past, when a new alcohol policy has been discussed that would change pricing, change accessibility, and so on, there has been pushback from the public. My question for the Minister is: how is she going to create public support for better alcohol policies? Thank you.

HON. DIANE THOM: As I mentioned, we are doing the research now. We will be coming together and hiring a position to be able to oversee this project. It is right, you know; we talk within this government that it is not just a government approach. We need to reach out and involve our Indigenous partners and other stakeholders in the Northwest Territories to be able to have positive results as we work through the alcohol strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.