

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 154-19(2): FOOD INSECURITY

March 5, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. In my reply to the budget, I spoke about new information from the community survey, which reveals that one in five NWT households has trouble meeting its most basic needs, including access to sufficient food. The rates of moderate to severe food insecurity have increased over the years. My question to the Minister is: why does she think these rates continue to go up despite more direct and indirect spending by government? Thank you.

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

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that the rates have been going up. I do want to talk about that. We had a meeting this week with the National Advisory Council on Poverty. During our meeting, we had some excellent discussions. These are 10 members across Canada who are dedicated, they are passionate, and they are knowledgeable. They are members from coast to coast to coast. We sat down and had an opportunity to talk about our anti-poverty work plan; it is the *Working Together II*. In there, we have identified a couple of key areas, especially food secure. The *Working Together II* has five pillars, and one of them references food security.

Going back to the meeting with the National Advisory Council on Poverty, we did mention some barriers that we are facing in the Northwest Territories, including the on reserve funding. On-reserve funding through the national poverty strategy does not benefit the Northwest Territories. We also talked about food security and how important it is for us. I say important because it is one of our 22 priorities here. We will be addressing that in our budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that response. What new initiatives or approaches is the Minister going to undertake to reduce and eliminate hunger in the Northwest Territories?

HON. DIANE THOM: I do want to talk about the action plan, because there are some initiatives in the action plan. I look at this, and it is multi-departmental; Health and Social Services is not just the department that is responsible for poverty. Our meeting today included our Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. We also had our Minister

of housing and Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Also, our Premier attended. It is not a one-department approach.

I do want to talk about the action plan because here are some ideas, and the Member is asking for some ideas: increasing income support to elders with people with disabilities. I apologize to them and speak on some of the issues that are within each of the departments. I hope that's okay, but this is an action plan that we all have input and have a responsibility for; a commitment to make childcare more assessable across the Northwest Territories; funding to address homelessness in the smaller communities through Northern Pathways, which is a housing program, and also the supportive housing program. We also provide funding to support the Housing First program, the rapid housing program in Inuvik and Yellowknife. These support people who are either homeless or at risk of being homeless. Action to address food security throughout supports to harvesting and to agriculture. Community gardening is another project that, as a government, we all need to enforce. I am looking at ITI, because our Minister of ITI is also responsible for some of these projects in the Northwest Territories.

MS. GREEN: I recognize that the new anti-poverty action plan is a multi-departmental plan. It is my understanding that it is in the leadership of the Minister of Health and Social Services. That is why I am asking her these questions today about food security. One of the things the anti-poverty action plan speaks to is creating a new food security coalition. Can the Minister tell us whether that work has started?

HON. DIANE THOM: The Member is correct. That is in our action plan. We are planning to establish a multi-sectorial NWT food security coalition. These are representatives from not only just the government, but also Indigenous governments, community governments, not-for-profit organizations, and this is something that we're establishing. I've looked at the action plan that the Member is talking about, the *Working Together II*, and, in there, the timeline for creating this coalition is in 2022.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Minister's answer. Minister, I think we've got to get started before 2022. There is so much hunger; 2,271 youth and children under 15. We just can't ask them to wait two more years while we get to work on this. We need to start immediately. The final question I have is about the federal government's role in helping to reduce and eliminate food insecurity which, of course, they do through the *Nutrition North* program. My question is: what action is the Minister

going to take with the federal government to improve the effectiveness of *Nutrition North*? Thank you.

HON. DIANE THOM: I apologize. I didn't realize that we weren't allowed to put props up, but I was just trying to show the Member that I actually have the action plan on poverty, so I apologize, Mr. Speaker. That was not my intent, other than to let the Member know. I do want to go back to the *Nutrition North* program. The *Nutrition North* program is a federal program, and our department, we all meet together, and part of the development of the coalition is to come together and really reach out. We've already said, this government, we can't do things alone, and we can't do things in silos. We need to reach out and engage with the partners, Indigenous groups, and non-Indigenous groups. The more partners and key stakeholders that we have coming together, we will have a stronger approach to go towards the federal government for *Nutrition North* funding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.