

MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA

Here's what N.W.T. constituents want during the pandemic, in MLAs'

own words

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CBC contacted all 19 MLAs and some of them told us what their constituents want

As the Northwest Territories races to prepare for COVID-19, phones have been ringing off the hook for many legislators.

"I am busier than I've ever been in the four-and-a-half years I've been an MLA," said Yellowknife Centre's Julie Green. "The stakes are really high."

CBC News asked lawmakers across the territory what they're hearing from constituents.

Many regions share similar issues. In a press release on Thursday, the territory's committee of regular MLAs noted concerns about the pressures on businesses and essential services in the N.W.T. It also recommended that the [government stop residential evictions](#) in the territory for three months.

CBC contacted all 19 MLAs. Some of them responded and here are their own words — condensed and edited for CBC style.

In alphabetical order:

- [Inuvik Twin Lakes MLA](#)
- [Kam Lake MLA](#)
- [Nunakput MLA](#)
- [Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh MLA](#)
- [Yellowknife Centre MLA](#)
- [Yellowknife North MLA](#)
- [Frame Lake MLA](#)

Inuvik Twin Lakes, Lesa Semmler

People are afraid and they want to know the person [who tested positive for COVID-19]. There are laws [about] privacy.

Knowing who it is, is not going to change the fact. They're going to do contact tracing, like they do with every case ... The people who were in contact will be notified — that's standard through the *Public Health Act*.

A few days ago there was a post going around, saying ... "can you say all the people you've been around if you've tested positive?" And if you're self-isolating and social distancing you should be able to say that.

But if you're out and about and not really caring, are you going to remember who you've been around? People need to really take this serious. We have essential staff that need to go to their families at night too. Everybody needs to be limiting the time they're going out so we can stop this in its tracks.

Kam Lake, Caitlin Cleveland

A lot of parents were reaching out as far as making sure we're doing what we can to address some of the fears or concerns that kids have. I teamed up with Dr. [Sarah] Cook and Minister [Caroline] Wawzonek to make our own little video, and we just [posted that on Facebook](#).

A lot of kids had questions. I thought it was pretty neat how diverse they were. "Why do I have to stay home? Why does my mom have to stay home from work?"

It was a lot of questions about how their world has changed, and ... why they are being asked to change their "normal." And I think those are really good questions — because adults have the same ones.

Nunakput, Jackie Jacobson

I've been hearing a lot of concerns about community travel, in regards to people flying into the coastal communities — Sachs [Harbour], Uluhaktok, Paulatuk [N.W.T.]. We're looking to make sure people travelling in do have a doctor's note that says "COVID-19 free...." I'm really getting a lot of messaging in regards to making sure community travel stops.

Our communities are more vulnerable.... I've been talking with my mayors every day in regards to the emergency plan. Going through the emergency plan, picking a place in the community where we can put people who get COVID-19 — [give them] a safe place, feed them, but make sure they're cared for properly in their own setting.

Everybody's really on edge now, because we've been waiting for it to hit the [Beaufort] Delta and it's hit Inuvik now. For my home community of Tuktoyaktuk, we're 148 kilometres away ... it's a big scare for everybody.

Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh, Steve Norn

We haven't seen anything like this in our lifetime. Right now the concerns come from everything from liquor issues to food, income assistance, housing: those are the main kinds of issues we're facing in my riding.

A lot of the liquor stores in the territory have reduced hours and we're talking about reducing more if we can. We're talking about also rationing [alcohol], just as a way of curbing bootlegging.

Our small airlines, Air Tindi, Northwestern Air, Aklak ... they're definitely essential services. We've got to keep our supply chain flowing. People in isolation, they still need to have groceries delivered ... there have been layoffs from each of our airlines because of reduced air traffic and people flying in and out of our fly-in communities ... we're always in discussions with each cabinet minister and our premier and we're all trying to get through this.

What we're trying to do right now, is minimize exposure to the elders.... We're getting the message out to the elders: "It's going to be tough." This social distancing ... it goes against our grain a lot.

This is the springtime. This is when we have all our carnivals, all our jamborees ... we mingle with each other, we hug, we shake hands, we greet each other; that's how we are as Northerners. This pandemic is a real pest right now ... but patience and discipline is what will get us through this.

Yellowknife Centre, Julie Green

I spent the big chunk of time [on Wednesday] on a guy who was going to be evicted at noon. There was a valid eviction order that was put in place a month ago — so, prior to the pandemic. And he has a number of issues to work through with his landlord. So I'm trying to assist him with that, and at the end of the day we had the eviction delayed. Which was a positive thing [for] this family of seven.

Putting a family on the street is really a disaster in every way, so anything I can do to try to prevent that — I'm up for that. We're trying to find more housing at this point for people who are normally homeless so they can self-isolate, rather than making that population bigger.

I'd say there's more interest at the moment in economic issues than in health-related issues, and I think that reflects some confidence in the way the chief public health officer is handling the health end of things. We do have these two cases (since this interview, the number of confirmed cases in N.W.T. [rose to four](#)) but in both cases people followed the advice that was given to self isolate.

Yellowknife North, Rylund Johnson

The constituents I'm hearing the most from are our small businesses. There's so many things rapidly changing for them, and in Yellowknife North, there's lots of tourism operators. Their season has rapidly disappeared — and I think a lot of small businesses are just trying to find any possible way to not lay off their staff.

Given the very fragile nature of small businesses in the North, there's definitely more that needs to be done to make sure those businesses can keep people on payroll over the next few months, to weather the storm.

Frame Lake, Kevin O'Reilly

The big issues I've heard people raise ... are really around the issues of the border closure. "What kind of information is being collected from people coming in? Where does that

information go? Is there follow up in terms of self isolation plans? What happens with complaints and investigations?"

People are also worried about why the mines continue to operate and what kind of measures are in place to make sure workers that come from the South don't contact Northern workers.

In Quebec, they've shut down all the mines and mineral exploration.... People are wondering, "why are the different jurisdictions taking different approaches? Why are we not as strict as some other jurisdictions?" And I think those are legitimate questions I have yet to get answers to.

Initially there was a lot of concerns around communications and information. I think those have been resolved for the most part. I do want to give credit to our Cabinet colleagues for improving communication with the general public.