

What We Heard from Northerners About Poverty

Premier Bob McLeod

February 8, 2012

17th Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, when our new government first met last October, we agreed on a vision for the Northwest Territories. Our vision is of strong individuals, families and communities sharing the benefits and responsibilities of a unified, environmentally sustainable and prosperous Northwest Territories. Developing an anti-poverty strategy is part of achieving this vision. It is linked with all of our goals and will ultimately form part of the basis for our government's coordinated approach to social issues.

Mr. Speaker, our goals as the 17th Assembly are all connected. To have healthy, educated people free from poverty, we need a diversified economy that provides all communities and regions with opportunities and choices. We need sustainable, vibrant, safe communities. We need an understanding by all parties that people's wellbeing is critical for the overall wellbeing of the Northwest Territories, our communities and our families.

Many Northerners continue to struggle. We spoke with many of them during the consultations that were held over the last year. In all, two-hundred-and-fifty people from across the Northwest Territories took part in these discussions in all regions. We heard from residents and stakeholders, from front line workers and clients, students, elders, businesses and non-governmental organizations, as well as community and Aboriginal leaders.

We heard that poverty is complex and influenced by many factors, such as education, employment, housing, and health. We were told to focus our efforts on poverty-related issues: addressing addictions, improving education and skills, improving housing and creating jobs. We need to address issues of wellness, poverty and addictions as we seek to keep our communities safe. We need to address the high cost of living and make sure that our programs encourage self-sufficiency. During our last Session, we saw Northerners' and Members' dedication to this issue.

Later today, at the appropriate time, I will table What We Heard, a summary of the consultation results. Our government believes in people and builds on the strengths of Northerners. It is time to begin the work of developing a strategy to respond to their concerns. Reducing poverty in the Northwest Territories is not something that the Government can do alone. Individuals, their families and communities, other governments, and volunteer and community organizations all play a role. We heard the need for leadership and accountability at all levels.

This government will work collaboratively with all stakeholders from Non-Governmental Organizations, Aboriginal governments, business, and others with an interest in poverty in the Northwest Territories. Under the leadership of the Social Envelope Committee

and a lead Deputy, this government will develop a plan and bring it back to this Assembly before the end of this calendar year.

In the meantime, work will continue on the actions we have already identified that will address the underlying factors that contribute to poverty. We are moving forward to enhance addictions treatment, address housing needs, and increase employment opportunities where they are most needed. We are helping people become and stay employed, reducing dependency on government programs and making investments in infrastructure that will create economic opportunity and reduce the cost of living in our communities.

We have also talked many times about the need to address housing issues, which are closely linked to our economic and social agendas. Housing is a major determinant of health and lack of housing makes economic development difficult, especially in our communities. The ongoing Shelter Policy Review will provide a long-term strategic framework for delivering housing in the Northwest Territories and the basis of specific actions on this priority.

Some of these projects will likely be identified in the final anti-poverty strategy. This work requires a balanced approach that acknowledges that action on one priority will support action on other priorities.

I look forward to returning to this House and to Committee to continue the discussion about how best to reduce poverty in the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.