

Caroline Cochrane: candidate for Range Lake riding

September 13, 2019

1. A \$40 million shortfall still exists for community governments. What is your position on the funding formula for community governments and the significant shortfall not being addressed over the past five years?

Community Governments are critical to the operations of the NWT and the GNWT provides annual funding to communities for operations and maintenance (O&M), water and sewer (W&S) services, and community public infrastructure. During the 18th assembly the funding for municipalities was increased each year, which has brought down the deficit by around 10 million since the 40 million was identified. My understanding is that we are close to addressing the deficit in the areas of O&M and W&S but there is still a substantial deficit in the capital line. MACA has been working with community governments to leverage their capital funding with federal infrastructure funding every year. In saying this, I am also aware that the review is now 4 or 5 years old and needs may have changed.

I believe we need to continue to try to address this deficit through annual increases to the funding provided. I think it would be unreasonable to expect the next government to fully address the deficit over their term, as the economy is not good, the GNWT is also working within a deficit budget, and there are huge financial needs in every area. I believe all levels of government in the NWT need to work together to try to increase our economic stability, address the needs of communities, and continue to lobby the Federal Government to change our base plus funding formula to one which takes the special circumstances of the north into consideration.

2. What steps will you take to ensure that communities funding shortfall as identified by MACA is addressed and do you commit to prioritizing funding?

As stated above, I believe we need to continue to work together to address this deficit and meet the needs of communities and the north as a whole. I also feel that it needs to be a priority for the 19th assembly. While I support annual increases to address the deficit, we will need to also look for support from the federal government and other funding opportunities, and all of us will need to look closely at our priorities, in order to address this issue within the economic reality we face.

3. Homelessness, mental health and addictions are serious issues in the North. Are you willing to work to ensure these issues get addressed and potential solutions put in place in a timely manner?

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My degree is in Social Work and homelessness is an issue that I have been working to address for many, many years, long before being elected MLA in 2015. During my term as the Minister of Housing and Minister Responsible for addressing homelessness the first thing I did was gather all the Yellowknife NGO's together to hear their solutions, I also reached out across the NWT to hear the concerns and solutions from residents. Based on this feedback, some of the things I did during my term was: commit to funding for the housing first program, built semi-independent units in Yellowknife, began construction of 3 shelters outside of Yellowknife, increased the funding provided to homeless shelters throughout the north, changed the rent subsidy program, and implemented a housing support position to assist people to stay in their units longer. The GNWT also increased the amount of rent provided for single people and allowed people with no stable home, access to income assistance monies.

The announced Federal funding of 180 million for the NWT will also assist in addressing the housing concern and the GNWT must continue to work with NGO's and the City of Yellowknife to ensure everyone has a home.

Poor mental health and addictions are major contributors to homelessness and touch most, if not all, of us within our own families. If we do not make these priorities, we will always be stuck in a state of intervention vs. prevention. During this last assembly, I was proud to roll out the first of 49 youth mental health counsellor positions to be located within schools throughout the NWT with full implementation to be completed in 3 years. Yellowknife will see this support in our schools in the new fiscal year.

But we have so much more to do, and we need to have mental health and addiction supports available for all populations in the north. We also need to consider methods such as on land programming as well as traditional supports. Aftercare support also needs to be a priority. I adhere to the philosophy "nothing about us without us" and I would also stress the importance of engaging all stakeholders as we move forward to address these critical concerns.

3.How do you think communities can prepare for the climate change crisis that is presently occurring in many communities and what is your position on the Territorial Government finding solutions and taking a leadership role with funding?

I believe that the creation of a Polytechnic University in the Northwest Territories will contribute significantly to helping communities to effectively understand and address the impacts of climate change and help find solutions and identify adaptation strategies. Again we must work together as there are traditional and scientific knowledge holders across the north and cutting edge academic researchers at Universities down south, and we need to bring all of this valuable knowledge together to create effective, culturally sound solutions. In the meantime, the GNWT needs to continue to support communities to access federal funding through the National Disaster Mitigation Program to deal with the effects of climate change and continue to implement alternative energy sources in communities in an effort to lower their reliance on diesel. As well, we need to consider climate change in all large infrastructure projects both within the GNWT and by community and aboriginal governments.

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5. What are your views on the issue of the early childhood education deficiency in the NWT and how it relates to post-secondary success of students and do you support an Auditor General Review of the education system?

As I've stated in the Legislative Assembly, I believe we need a stronger approach, and additional funding for Early Childhood Education/Intervention as well as all education in the north. We need children ready to learn when they enter the school doors, and proper supports once they are in school. I was shocked when I received the results of the EDI when I started my term as Minister of ECE and it is a concern that we need to make a priority for everyone. Many, not all, of our children are struggling and even though Yellowknife results were better, we still need to try to ensure every child has the supports to succeed. I will continue to strongly advocate, elected or not, until we can properly fund and implement a system where education, parenting and family support is seen as the key to addressing many social issues associated with poverty.

We did make some progress in the 18th assembly however:

- JK is being accessed by over 500 children in the NWT,
- ECE has increased the amount of scholarships available for students studying Early Childhood Development,
- Aurora College has expanded the certificate program to a full time, two-year diploma program,
- ECE increased funding to licensed childcare providers and
- the GNWT increased the NWT Child Benefit,
- The GNWT is also currently organizing the rolling out of support teams of professionals to go into the smaller communities to provide services where it was historically not available. These teams will include a behavioural specialist, mental health specialist, speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, and educational psychology specialist.
- The move to strengthen our post-secondary by offering a Polytechnic University will also assist in providing the skills, tools and resources necessary to help children in the NWT succeed.

We have done some work, but have more to do. I believe that a strong foundation is key to the success of our children and youth and the creation of a prepared and stable workforce to carry us into the future.

I also believe audits are a critical component of any program or agency. I have an extensive background in accreditation, and believe that we need to focus on implementing best practices at all levels to ensure that all children have access to a quality education. An audit can either be seen as a tool to reprimand those providing services, or a tool to clearly identify our strengths and areas we need to place a higher focus on. I prefer the later, and believe audits, along with stakeholder engagement are both critical pieces of working within a "best practice" framework.

6. The 2018 Federal Budget affirmed that its expectation is that a 25% portion of the revenues from cannabis excise taxes provided to the Territory and Provinces be transferred to municipalities and local communities. What is your view of the GNWT deciding that there will be no revenues passed on to the municipalities from the Territorial Government?

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Cannabis sales, and the associated tax revenues, are a new addition to the Territorial budget, and not all communities are currently selling cannabis, or supportive of selling cannabis within their boundaries. Going forward, I will support careful consideration of the federal intention of where these tax revenues were to be directed in terms of sharing revenues towards any additional issues faced by the communities as a result of the legalization or as a means to help address the needs of communities in general. Best practice is done by supporting each other to meet the needs of everyone.