

Kieron Testart for Kam Lake MLA

September 12, 2019

In reply to NWT Association of Communities – Questions for MLA Candidates Election 2019:

(Answers in number sequence to each question received)

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?

I have been a vocal advocate during my term in office calling for this funding to put in place and my record will show that I have always taken this matter very seriously. These funds are crucial to growing our territorial economy, providing growth at the local community level and will create more than 200 jobs in the NWT. This gap is not some external formula, rather it is the GNWT's own responsibility and it is unacceptable that the government continues to plead poverty and avoid taking responsibility for its own policies. The final capital budget of the 18th Legislative Assembly was the largest of its kind during my term and yet still underfunded Community Public Infrastructure across the territory. I voted against this budget on principle as it continued to ignore the needs of our communities.

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?

I am committed to closing the municipal funding raising gap within the first two budgets of the 19th Legislative Assembly if I am re-elected by the people of Kam Lake. Finally, I will not vote to support any cabinet minister who do not commit to closing this gap and will ask each candidate for Premier and Cabinet to commit to close the gap during the next Territorial Leadership Committee.

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?

Regardless of where you live in the NWT, our communities care about the poor state of addictions and mental health and clearly the well-intentioned solutions of the 18th Assembly are not working to significantly reduce the issues of homelessness, addictions and public safety. My platform is committed to the creation of brick and mortar treatment facilities specializing in addictions detox and managed alcohol programs. I no longer accept the rationale from Government insiders that local treatment centres won't work in the NWT. We need more options to promote wellness in our communities and address the long-standing substance abuse problems that seemingly affect our Capital the most. These facilities need to be accompanied with program funding for housing first and transitional housing that provide more dollars for staff that can provide wraparound services to clients and the entire continuum of care must be informed by culturally informed trauma-based treatment. Addictions and homelessness are not a root causes, they are symptoms of deeper issues arising most frequently from intergenerational trauma created by the mistakes of colonization.

4. 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 worked extensively in the 18th Assembly reviewing the Auditor General report on the GNWT's response to climate change and provided ongoing oversight of its efforts to coordinate climate change adaptation and mitigation as a member of the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment. Unfortunately, the GNWT continues to lack formal mechanisms to coordinate its leadership over climate change action and the plans put forward by the government are un-costed and provide limited support to Northern communities. I believe climate change action is needed as a whole of government response that takes into account the specific challenges of local governments and the communities they represent. We must work with the Federal Government to bring significant financial support to adapt to changing circumstances, such as coastal erosion and thawing permafrost, and add a new category to the municipal funding formula for climate change adaptation that varies based on community need.

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?

Although graduation rates are often above average in some NWT communities, the territory as a whole struggles to ensure that our young people receive proper education that sets them up for opportunity in their adult lives. This is a systemic issue that needs real attention from the 19th Assembly and I believe it must be a major undertaking of the next government. The public, community governments and Indigenous Governments and Organizations must have a seat at the table to ensure that local and culturally appropriate solutions are developed collaboratively to ensure that we can get the education system back on track. I would also support a call for a formal Auditor General review of education, especially in light of the current education minister's comments that the system was failing our children. An independent review with clear recommendations is the best way to start fixing what is broken and getting results for stronger educational outcomes for Northerners and their families.

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?

Underfunding municipal governments is sadly a longstanding systemic failure of previous governments, despite the advocacy of MLAs to fix the problem. Keeping all cannabis revenues as GNWT revenue is just another way communities aren't getting a fair share of the resources they need to support new laws and regulations in the wake of legalized cannabis. I support new funding for municipalities to develop capacity to regulate cannabis and other legislative changes, such as 9-1-1 emergency services. This funding can be paid for through new fees and revenues arising from the policy changes and then be built into the municipal funding formula to ensure each community is given support according to its own needs.