

Rylund Johnson Yellowknife North
September 10, 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 believe it's a big problem that we need to address. I'll commit to putting this at the top of my agenda and advocating for our government to work with its partners to find the answer to this growing issue.

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?

To address this issue, we're going to need to bring together community governments and engage our federal partners to prioritize getting key funding in-place as soon as possible.

Next, we're going to make sure that "need" is accurately reflected in the funding formula. That means making sure the calculations reflect the actual costs of maintaining infrastructure like water, sewer, and roads in our communities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. This will help bring long-term sustainability.

Given that we haven't made serious changes to how we fund communities since 2007, I think this should be a priority in the next Assembly.

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?

I commit to advocating for a swift move to an approach centred on harm reduction and evidence-based care. And here are a few key investments I think could get us there quickly.

- **Building an addictions treatment centre in Yellowknife:** we need a hub for culturally-relevant primary and wraparound care for those struggling with addiction in our territory.
- **Investing in accelerating Housing First across the territory:** getting people in homes ends homelessness and drastically increases the chances of them getting back on their feet. We've seen our capital taking the first steps to implement this program, but we could accelerate the process.
- **Implementing a managed alcohol program:** studies show that bringing stability to addicts' lives through managed substance programs increase the likelihood of recovery and save lives. Given our documented problems with alcoholism, it's time our territory gets off its hands and act boldly.

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?

Different communities have different imminent and long-term challenges they will face as a result of climate change. A lot of them will be related to community infrastructure. I think step one is auditing what these challenges are going to be, prioritizing them, and making them known.

As this is a global issue, I think both the federal and territorial governments should have a role to play in funding the projects which will help address these challenges. These will be big investments, but they're ultimately going to cost a whole lot more if we don't address them while there's still time. I believe the GNWT and City of Yellowknife must come together and make Yellowknife a carbon neutral city by 2030, with others to follow, this is an ambitious project that will require significant federal funding and cooperation, but we must start now.

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?

I think this is a crisis facing our territory. If our children aren't prepared to succeed from a young age, they will inevitably fall behind later. As our economy continues to evolve, that's only going to present more and more challenges as they enter a very different job market than we've ever seen.

I support an Auditor General review of the education system. I think the report on youth in care was a big wake-up call to politicians and the public service. I think the education system could benefit from that kind of scrutiny. We need a child advocate position in every community. We need to start devolving powers to indigenous governments now and working together to find creative solutions to address this crisis.

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?

Communities should be funded based on need. That's the key issue here. The territorial government needs to do its part to address the underfunding of communities. They should use revenues from cannabis or any other source to do so. In order to maximize revenues, we must ensure we are competing with the ongoing illegal market. The failure to build a private cannabis industry must be addressed to maximize revenues.