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Access to Federal Housing Funding & Committee Consultation

Committee of the Whole—2016-2017 Operating Budget Review

NWT Housing Corporation—June 15, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair, I'll try to keep this short and I don't want to prolong the discussion. I don't know what Yukon and Nunavut are doing in terms of preparing a plan or a proposal for the federal government...

As I was saying, I don't know what the Yukon or Nunavut are doing in terms of preparing a proposal or submission to the federal government for extra money for housing but I'm trying to put myself in the shoes of the federal minister. If there are these national standards for housing, that's what the last discussion was largely around, we need to use those and adopt them. So we've got a 2014 survey that identifies a bunch of our housing as being in core need. The issue is we don't have that costed out.

We need to-- in my opinion, and I'm trying to put myself in the shoes of a federal minister, I want to see a proposal that actually costs out what it would be to bring our housing out of core need. That's the kind of plan, that's the kind of proposal that I think a federal minister wants to see.

So how are we going to have that put together, using existing money or some other way, so that we can cost out what the core need is, and that can be submitted to the federal government? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If the Members would like, we can actually put together a document that shows the costing to address every single core need within the Territories. We can provide that.

The reality, though, is that the argument that we give for the tri-territories is a business case based on the higher cost of living within the Territories, and so we advocate again, not on each territory-- on what each territory would need, we just advocate based on that we have the highest core needs amongst the three Territories in all of Canada. And the federal transfer payments currently for housing cannot be based on a population base; that it has to be base plus funding. And contrary to what I said, I mean, the tri-territorial business case that we just provided to the federal government resulted in us getting \$35 million. So actually advocating as three territories without costing and saying that we have huge needs has worked in that we've never gotten \$35 million and now we've gotten that, and the federal government has recognized that we have to have a northern strategy. So they're listening just on the basis of us saying that we have higher cost of living; that we have a huge Aboriginal population; that we have huge needs and that's the business case we provided and to date it's working. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank the Minister for her answer there. I think it would be really help if the Regular MLAs then actually saw this business case that was submitted. So if that could be provided to Committee I think that would help us understand.

I applaud the efforts of the Housing Corp. in putting that kind of work together to get the feds off the per capita housing formula that tends to be used for federal funding programs so that's great. And that's part of the issue, but I think the motion that we were talking about earlier in the House is: what would it take to get our housing stock out of core need? How do we cost that out and can we put together a plan and can that form the basis of submissions to federal funding programs.

So that's where I think the Regular MLAs were coming from, is we want to have that 2014 survey that shows core need, what is going to cost us to get out of that situation if we put that together as proposals and cost it out and get that into the federal government I think we're getting closer. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are a number of variables to address the whole core need of the NWT and we can do that. It would take a bit of time and a bit of work but we can produce that. Of course, it wouldn't be an exact science because there are differences.

The bigger issue for me, though, is that we have an understanding amongst the three territories that we will not advocate individually; that we will advocate as tri-territorial which gives us more power, and unless I can get the other territories to do the same then it sounds like I'm going to be advocating for the Northwest Territories and going against the understanding and the partnership that we formed. So I can bring it forward to the other territories but I'm a little bit confused. And if the other territories say that they don't want to go there, that they're okay with how we're doing it with the base funds, is the recommendation that I go forward and become individual and advocate as an individual territory? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Minister. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. And I appreciate the Minister letting us know that there are some intricacies to working with the other two territories. I look forward to having a discussion at Committee around that.

You know, our submissions to the federal government for our needs don't always have to go-- as I understand it, within the federal budget there's-- even some of the infrastructure funding that might be made available is going to be wide open. So we may be able to use that avenue to help fund core housing needs in the Northwest Territories. So, in any event, I understand how we need to work with Nunavut and Yukon, and I look forward to having a discussion with standing committee around that, but at the same time we need to have even a plan like that for ourselves so that we know strategically where resources have to be placed to get us out of core need. And if we can get the feds help contribute to that even better. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister Cochrane.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So we can work on that as well. I would like to meet with Committee on that. We'll do the costing, bring it to Committee. The biggest thing that I'm really conscious of when meeting with the Yukon Territory Housing Minister who has been in her term for a number of terms, has said that this is the first time that we've got all three Territories to come together on housing and actually agree to a partnership. So I really want to be careful that we don't sabotage that because trust is really hard to gain and really easy to lose. So we will do the costing and we'll bring it to Committee, but I want to make sure that we are strategic within our moving forward on that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.