

NWT Association of Communities Questionnaire

Responses from Kevin O'Reilly, Candidate for MLA Frame Lake

Submitted to: nicole@nwtac.com

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 am aware of the municipal funding gap review and I strongly advocated for a plan to close it during the 18th Assembly. Such a plan was never tabled, despite promises to do so. I strongly support the recommendations of the review where no communities would lose funding, and future funding would be related to infrastructure and operational needs.

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 a three-term member of the Yellowknife City Council and as Frame Lake MLA 2015-19, I've had experience with the way the GNWT funds municipalities from both sides. I know that even tax-based communities have difficulties meeting the needs of their citizens for essential municipal services. I support the next Assembly budgeting sufficient funds to address the existing shortfall over its four-year life. After that, I support allocations that allow municipalities to keep up with inflation and their operational and infrastructure needs.

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?*

During my first term as a member of the Legislative Assembly, I worked diligently to change the minds of Cabinet as to what proper budgetary priorities should be. Chasing large infrastructure projects and more work in the extractive sector is not bearing fruit, and needs to be better balanced with housing, education and the needs of our communities. It is often said that throwing money at problems is not

a solution. In this case, I don't believe that adage is true. Homelessness, mental illness and addiction all need greater investment by GNWT. Addressing such social issues should be a higher government priority. It has been my priority and it will continue to be should I be re-elected.

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?*

We are in a climate crisis situation and our past efforts have generally failed as shown through a recent review by the Auditor General of Canada, especially in terms of leadership and authority. A Climate Crisis Act should:

- establish clear authority and responsibility within GNWT for action;
- partnerships with outside sectors including municipal governments to develop a NWT-wide approach (e.g., a Leadership Council);
- clear and comprehensive public reporting of results in terms of collection and use of the carbon tax, investment in renewables, and greenhouse gas reductions; and
- ensure that climate change implications are routinely considered in terms of government spending, programs and services.

Some other priority areas:

1. The greatest bang for the buck to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the NWT is in converting to home and business heating to wood pellets or chips and reducing diesel power generation. Both of these sectors could be addressed through targeted territorial programs to get pellet stoves and boilers installed. Economic development opportunities would also foster the production of wood pellets and chips from burned off forest areas.

2. I support the use of small hydro for communities such as Whati, Gameti, Wekweti and Lutsel K'e that have good potential. Getting these communities off diesel can be accomplished efficiently and effectively, and will reduce power bills for everyone. Large hydro project such as Taltson expansion are full of

uncertainty as there is no money to build it, no buyers for the power have been identified, and large projects elsewhere have proven to be very controversial (e.g., Muskrat Falls, Site C and more). However, existing Taltson power should certainly be used for regional development in the South Slave.

3. Working closely with the federal government and community governments, programs must be developed to help communities adapt to the inevitable disruption that is coming. Climate adaptation plans should be funded and implemented for each community to take in their special needs.

Finally, for the record, I opposed the new carbon tax, not because I don't think a price on carbon might work, but rather because all the authority and discretion over rebates, grants and reporting lie with the Finance Minister alone. We could have had a system like the Yukon where there is municipal and Indigenous government rebates and revenue sharing spelled out in legislation, but Cabinet refused to consider such an approach.

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 support the development of a NWT Polytechnic University with a campus in Yellowknife, that is part of a strong network that include the existing campuses in Fort Smith and Inuvik and all the community learning centres. That being said, educational outcomes in our primary and secondary schools have not improved over the last four years, and in some cases, have actually declined. We simply need a greater overall investment and focus on our entire education system to ensure our student are prepared and able to participate in post-secondary education. Much attention was drawn away from the Educational Renewal Initiative due to the poor planning and communication around Junior Kindergarten and change in instructional hours for teachers, both of which I supported but wanted to be fully funded and evaluated. We need to return to the Education Renewal Initiative and develop full and funded action plans.

We also need a greater investment in early childhood development so our children are prepared for the educations system. Midwifery services and early childhood initiatives have tremendous benefits for the investments made. A

study done in 2015 showed that universal childcare could be implemented in the NWT for about \$22 million a year. This seems to be a very low cost considering the benefits. High quality childcare is good for the child, good for families, and good for communities.

I would not oppose an Auditor General review of the education system although I am not sure it may be needed at this point. However, I do support more effective public reporting by ECE of our early childhood development and education system results and outcomes.

- 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?*

I participated in the review of GNWT's cannabis legalization legislation and got hear community concerns firsthand, including those from community governments over the need for education, information on community government rights, and coordinated enforcement. I attempted to make some amendments to the legislation that would provide greater powers and options for community governments but they did not get support from Cabinet.

I strongly supported recommendations from the Standing Committee around collaborative work with community governments on cannabis legalization including adequate funding of new responsibilities under the legislation. It only seems fair that revenue-sharing should be part of that discussion and I am happy to support this concept and push it during my second term.

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