

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 168-12(2): FOOD SECURITY IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

March 10, 2020

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier. Earlier today, I recounted some of the statistics from the latest community survey, where almost a quarter of NWT residents purported being worried "sometimes" or "often" about food security. Can the Premier tell us what specific actions this government is taking to build food security and whether we have any specific targets over the next four years? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Food, clothing, and shelter are, according to Maslow's hierarchy, the basic needs that we need to meet for people; so when I hear that almost 3,400 people, my understanding is, are feeling insecure about their food, that brings concerns. It should bring concerns for all of our governments. What are we doing about it?

We do have things that we are working on, a range of activities, from increasing local food production to, of course, our agricultural industry that was just spoken about earlier today. Our territorial Anti-Poverty Action Plan includes 12 actions on food security, including the establishment of a food security coalition for the NWT, so we will be moving forward on this action plan, as well. Then, of course, we are looking to work with the Government of Canada, constantly working with the Government of Canada, to get some input into the redesign of our Nutrition North. I have heard for many years that that is not working. It's time for the Government of Canada to hear us and make a Nutrition North program that more works for the Northwest Territories.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Premier for that response. It was 3,400 households, not individuals; it's a lot more individuals who are worried about food. Mr. Speaker, without a proper tracking system to account for local food production and consumption, it seems unlikely that there will be any measurable progress towards building stronger food security. Can the Premier tell us whether there is indeed a proper tracking system in place for food security in the NWT, and if not, will she commit her Cabinet to developing one?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: The Member knows that, actually, the NWT Bureau of Statistics does track food prices in the larger regional centres, such as Yellowknife, Hay River, et cetera. They also, every few years, do a comparison across the communities,

and from that, a food price index is calculated. It shows variations in the price of food across the communities. The question on whether we would track further than that, that is a question that, at this point, I am not willing to actually make a commitment to. It's one thing to be able to track how many people might start an egg-producing farm or a large scale farm. How many people actually have greenhouses in their backyard, such as myself? Those would be impossible to track, but those are really important food initiatives that people have to take in the Northwest Territories. I grew up here in 1962, and I couldn't even grow grass; I never knew we used to have farming here. It's an initiative that we have to push further. We need to look at food production in all areas, whether it's in harvesting to growing your own crops. However, to be able to take numbers on all of that, like I said, the backyard farmers, it would be a little bit more difficult.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Premier for that. Look, prices do have a relation to food security, but I asked about food production: do we have a way of measuring food production and consumption of local foods? I don't think it's impossible to track. We have a greenhouse in our front yard, as well. We can survey people and get a better idea of this.

I want to make it a little easier for the Premier with the next question, ask her about an area that she should be familiar with, and that is Nutrition North. Can the Premier tell us, specifically, what action is being undertaken by the federal government and our government to redesign Nutrition North?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Right now, I cannot say, honestly, what is being done at this point. There has just been a new election within the Northwest Territories and, of course, federally, there was a new election that just happened, too. We have done initial meetings with our Ministers and the Prime Minister. I will be meeting again with the Prime Minister this week. However, it isn't something that we have actually said, "Here's an action plan on it."

Nutrition North is not working in the Northwest Territories. I did not have to come into the Legislature to hear that. I have heard it for many years. What I can commit to is that I will be bringing it forward to the Minister for the North. It is in our Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. I will continue to advocate for it, as well as all of the other issues that we have in the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. Final supplementary, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Premier for that. I am just a little bit perturbed that Nutrition North needs to be redesigned but that we don't really have any ideas about how to do that. I hope the Premier can put something together fairly quickly and get that ready and work with this side of the House.

Building food security is going to take a lot of effort from this government, and it's going to cut across many departments. For example, food security can and should include greater support for community harvesters and local food production. Can the Premier tell us what the best programs are to support community harvesting and local food production and whether these will be increased over the next four years?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I cannot stand here and say what the best program is. What I can say is that we have a variety of programs across the departments. For example, our anti-poverty fund gives \$1 million a year in contributions; last year, in 2019- 2020, we supported 31 food security projects. Our healthy children's fund provides \$400,000 a year; that gave a total of seven security projects through this fund. Thirteen food security projects were supported through the Small Community Homelessness Fund. The Healthy Food for Learning program, and this is one is a big one for me, supports all 49 schools in the Northwest Territories for healthy foods for children. The Canadian Agricultural Partnership is a federal partnership; it gives a million dollars a year to advance community food development. ITI has the Northern Food Development Program to support producers of fish, meat, and other food products. We are revitalizing the Great Slave Lake fishery; I think that is an important one. The Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan supports land-based initiatives, including harvesting. We have a Community Harvesters Assistance Program, and we are looking at a mentorship program, as well. As well, the Indigenous governments asked for a hunter education program to support safe hunting.

I can't say which one of them is all important. What I can say, is that not one food source works for all people. Some people are very traditional. Some people are hunters and gatherers. Some people want to go to our grocery store. We need to look right across the gamut to ensure food security. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.