

ORAL QUESTION—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

QUESTION 639-19(2): POVERTY REPORT CARD

March 4, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services who has responsibility for the GNWT Anti-Poverty Strategy. In my statement, I referred to the recommendations put forward in the first poverty report card produced by Alternatives North. Is the Minister aware of these recommendations from this report, and does she intend to respond to the report publicly? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have read the report card, I have met with Alternatives North, and I am very appreciative of the effort that they put into the first ever report card. The government is not planning to provide a response to the report card. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. Look, I know that she is a passionate advocate on the issue of poverty and actually had a lot to do with the first strategy that was developed. I was a little bit disappointed to hear that response, so I might try something else. I'm aware that the work is under way in collaboration with the federal government to produce an updated northern market basket measures that would allow us to better monitor and track poverty here, especially in smaller communities. Can the Minister update us on this work including when a northern-specific market basket measure will be introduced?

HON. JULIE GREEN: This is work being undertaken and lead by Statistics Canada. What I know about this is that Statistics Canada held consultation workshops with government and non-government stakeholders in October and November two years ago in 2018, and it's my understanding that a member of Alternatives North attended the workshop that was here. The result of that is that the Yukon and the Northwest Territories have been assisting Statistics Canada to establish thresholds for their respective territories for the market basket measure. The end result was a proposal to create a Northern MBM and provide some methodology for how that's going to be calculated. Consultation is now open on the topic of this proposal, and of course, they would be delighted to hear from anyone who has a view on this. What I do need to say, however, is that this will not be a community-level measure when it is complete. It will be a regional measure. It will be available in six regions of the NWT.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that, and I'm sure that our Bureau of Statistics is eagerly engaged in that work, as well. One of the most disturbing conclusions of the poverty report card is the state of food security or insecurity confronting one in four families here. I'm aware that the recent anti-poverty round table focused on the issue of food insecurity. Can the Minister indicate what specific action is being undertaken on the issue of food security, specifically following the anti-poverty

round table, even if it means working with her colleagues, other colleagues in Cabinet?

HON. JULIE GREEN: The focus on food security is really a whole-of-government approach with several different departments contributing solutions to how to create and grow more food in the North, whether that's gardens, eggs, meat, whatever. The objective of the round table the Member referenced, which was at the end of January, was to bring together people from the Northwest Territories with people who are working on food security solutions in other jurisdictions that are rural and remote and Indigenous like ours. It's my understanding that these 80 delegates who attended had a very good conversation about this. There's a report being prepared, which will be tabled in this House, and it will lead the way forward in what more we can do to address what the Member rightly calls an appalling rate of poverty.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister again for that. This government's anti-poverty strategic framework dates from 2013. Many of the key indicators around income disparity, food security, housing, and more have actually gotten worse since 2013. Can the Minister tell us when there will be a formal evaluation of our poverty work and more systemic solutions put forward such as guaranteed basic income, a living wage, or even economic restructuring? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: The strategy which, as the Member says, was released in 2013, was followed by an action plan released in 2015 and then, again, another action plan that came out in 2019 and runs until 2022. It builds on those original pillars in the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Just to remind the Member, that's children and family support, healthy living and reaching our potential, safe and affordable housing, sustainable communities, and the integrated continuum of service. What the Bureau of Statistics has done is created a special section on its website to report on poverty indicators that were agreed at the 2016 anti-poverty round table. I'm not going to list them all, but they are numerous. They include things like food security, children receiving services, employment rates, and so on. We realized that we have not conquered poverty, but we remain actively engaged in coming up with solutions that will help people to live without want. Thank you.