

Constituency Meeting –
February 16, 2022
Online

Don't have a formal agenda for today, thought I would leave it open to questions if you have them.

Budget Session starts next Tuesday so feel free to tune in. There will be new funding initiatives, highlights on spending, it will be a chance for me to speak to the financial vision of the government and fiscal picture for the NWT. Look at it like an arc between the budget years, they should all be connected.

Still getting inquiries on how we should be spending our money, there is never a wrong time to send in your thoughts. It changes throughout the year, and funds do get re-profiled. But to be a true part of the profile of the budget, the best timing is to send it in the spring, with the planning cycle to be in the formal budget. Learning now there is constant shuffling as priorities change, pivoting to respond to situations like covid. Prep goes the full year, but the next couple weeks are going to be busy, budget speech, to the media explaining it all, and then the process with the MLAs as we are a minority government and where we can find middle ground to have in the end a consensus style budget. More talking, more meetings, more sitting down, but everyone is committed to this process.

No other major issues or highlights coming this budget session, covid always come up, now there is a focus towards the endemic of this.

Covid Related Questions from Constituents:

Is the GNWT paying for the rapid tests for the unvaccinated or undeclared employees?

- 323 employees who opted not to reveal their status.
- Departments request the rapid tests. we were at the front end of what was happening with government, consultations with unions, within a few weeks all governments were moving forward on mandatory, and we stood by that decision. Health Canada tests were separate. We had enough from the Federal separate to the Health Canada supply for two months. They are at no cost to employees for now. We'll see where we go next.

Was there some sort of sunset clause put into that? Or is it indefinite?

- The policy itself says it will be reviewed in 6 months, and it already got reviewed and expanded (Delta wave), still subject to within 6 month review. I do a bi-weekly review with my departments. 6 months from October. It is always based on what is done with the CPHO. We are watching what they do to determine what we do.

What measures are being put in place for office spaces/schools/private sector to protect folks? (What are WSCC expectations on safety?)

- WSCC is responsible for the OHS rules for individual workplaces. What makes that challenging is that they are adapting them to each workplace. School vs. small office. It is the degree of risk for the individual and setting, are they interacting with each other, the

public? Hard to give a round up on that, but OHS is very involved. They continue to be involved with how Omicron behaves compared to Delta.

Will there be a change in masking rules, and will KN95s and N95s be expected?

- There are masking rules from CPHO and rules from the GNWT. GNWT mirrors CPHO. They have not formally imposed that kind of mask, or specifics. I haven't heard rumblings on it, but I think they have put out stuff to say that KN95/N95s are preferred. There is also concern on the availability. The Covid Secretariat sourced PPE for schools, NGOs, community groups.
- Communities did have issues with getting them at first so the Secretariat helped them get them.
- Depending on your circumstances, if you are in a workplace that says that they can't get them, there is an intention to make sure that there is some procurement to help them.

What is the plan for the next outbreak?

- . As Minister of Finance I sit with CPHO, and Covid Secretariat pretty regularly, , to discuss the transition plan that includes surge capacity for further outbreaks.
- Secretariat is being phased out as promised. We all thought last fall that it was going to be done, Delta hit, then Omicron hit. We're trying right now to read the crystal ball and how to get out of crisis response, it exhausts everyone, but at the same time there has been successive waves.
- There is a real recognition for surge capacity.

Am I correct in understanding vaccination mandates for schools?

- No mandates for schools.
- Booster shots were offered at school.
- The youth who were old enough had access and a lot of them used the school opportunity.

Contingency plan for Grads; can we have the march, can we have Prom? Parents thought we are lifting those. Are restrictions lifting?

- I'm sure Minister Green signalled that the public health emergency to be done in the spring. It is based on modeling. They are looking at southern jurisdictions, extrapolating their data and using our numbers. We are seeing spring with the modeling which means that the emergency order should be lifted. The variants that they are seeing are likely to be similar to Omicron, so highly transmissible but not as severe. When the emergency order is lifted all the orders would be lifted. Section 25 allows for restrictions for a localized emergency, not quite the same, just not a blanket wide one.
- If the target remains on track, and the models are still saying that, we should see this lifted. This should be in time for grad.

When the Minister says Spring what does she mean?

- Calendar Spring - June to me seems like late spring.

Is the entire secretariat winding down, and will transfers be sent back to where they were?

- The intention was that the Secretariat would always wind down. They will be phasing out the Secretariat and the Isolation Centres will wind down as well. Isolation requirements have also just changed as well. As rules shift downwards and shift, end of March, there is less need for isolation centres. To the extent that there is going to be a transition period. HSS, EMO, CPHO, they are still working together as there will still be a need, communities, the transition plan is in the works. It's not that there will a close of everything at the same time.

General Questions from Constituents

The Feds put up the billion dollar pot to help POV - what was the cut to the NWT.

- I will have to figure that out, as there were a bunch of different pots. Can find out and let you know. It wasn't that cut and dry, no magic check in August or September. We did get some funding in the fall, we did have specific for the healthcare sector.

What do you think is coming up in session this time?

- Always questions about housing and spectrum of it (home ownership, shelters)
- I think Covid will still have a lot of questions. Some will go to Minister Green, Premier, or Minister Thompson (MACA is more of a surge responses for emergency services.)
- Budget Sessions we do have briefings with MLAs so that they can prepare themselves for that. Was with them for the two weeks to see what they were coming with to Session in relation to Budget
- Education gets a lot with the early childhood for Canada. That was a fast turn-around on the policy work on that.
- Yellowknife Lands transfers, polytechnique, mental health and addictions always comes up. Pandemic has made that worse.
- Medical Travel, power outages.

The YWCA Rent Assist Program informed constituent that they ran out of funding in November. Not sure what their fiscal year is so not sure when the funds get topped up. This speaks to a broader issue, the fact that they ran out means that clearly people are financially hurting. Have you seen something like this in other areas or programs?

- The question we need to look at this is has it been over prescribed year on year or just the last two years? When I was on the board funds were always tight. Is there a trend in that specific program, can't really answer that in five minutes.
- I'll have to check in with housing on that.
- I suspect that they have an April 1 fiscal start.

Comment: NGOs need to know about funding before April 1, but always subject to approval of MLAs. We should have better long term funding for NGOs, and they should get it right at the beginning of the fiscal year, April 1, not later in June, so that they can start spending right away.

Comment: People are finding it tight right now. Got hit by Covid in the fall and it impacted work. Partner now has to work a month of over time because our family is still behind from that impact. There

is funding to help businesses but not for individuals. The CERB \$1000 does not go far for a single income household. Wish there could have been more for the individual or for the family, then just for businesses.

Further information from Caroline:

- Still working on procurement, ITI and Finance. ITI is the lead. Been a learning curve for me. Coming from the private sector I was like, why don't you just change it? I was surprised to learn that procurement is all across the board in the GNWT - Indigenous procurement, this is the place to do it, intergovernmental council, how do you want us to go about this, slower process but will produce a better result.
- Defining Northern Business, BIP, that work is continuing, pushing folks on the small things that they can do right now for business.
- Mineral resources, e-services last fall, hopefully more to come in the spring. Information shared systems services are working hard on that.
- ITI still a fair bit of business relief for Covid.
- Highlights from other departments, ECE - modernization of the education act. Polytechnique, going out to public consultation, placement of the campus here in Yellowknife, if you are interested let me know. Stay tuned and will make sure you are informed.
- Review work in general is coming to a head in the spring. IA was under review. ECE and ITI are looking at the immigration process, it wasn't in the mandate, but we've discovered it with the labour market shortage across Canada. Knowledge Economy review and report. Makerspace opening this spring.
- Planning on more Budget Dialogue during the summer
- Hoping next constituency meeting can be in person.
- Will do some more door knocking in the summer.