

SUPPORT TO VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Mr. Speaker, earlier in the life of this Assembly I made a Member's statement concerning the voluntary sector in the N.W.T. The voluntary sector is essential to community wellness. Volunteers and voluntary groups, often referred to as non-government organizations, support the values and overall health of communities at large. In my previous Member's statement and follow-up questions to the Premier I asked the Premier to improve the G.N.W.T.'s relationship with and financing of this sector.

A first step would be to designate a lead minister responsible for the voluntary sector, a minister responsible at the executive level, rather than putting the entire sector under the responsibility of a department with a focused mandate such as Municipal and Community Affairs. The sector covers all areas of responsibility and is not limited to just sports and recreation. There is clearly a difference between volunteer development and the area of sports and recreation dealing with government-wide policy and financing issues that cut across the sector as a whole.

When asked to designate a minister responsible for the sector, I received no commitment from the Premier. Since then the Members of this Assembly have completed our strategic planning. In our strategic plan there is clear reference to supporting and strengthening the voluntary sector as a whole. The cabinet's response to the strategic plan also makes reference to supporting the voluntary sector, as did, although incredibly briefly, the Premier in his opening comments during the sitting of this Assembly.

In order for the voluntary sector and government to work more effectively together, the responsibility for entrenching and maintaining the relationship should rest in the executive. Other jurisdictions in Canada, such as Newfoundland and New Brunswick, have already adopted this approach.

A department dedicated to relationship building, located in a department such as MACA, even though they have a lead role in sports and recreation, will be less effective in reaching across the whole of government than the responsibility based in the central and executive location.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I'll be asking the Premier questions concerning the voluntary sector and will be seeking his commitment to dedicate a Minister at an executive or cross-government level to be the primary contact for relationship building and strategic planning with the voluntary sector as a whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.