

Dispute Over Indian and Inuit Healthcare Costs

Mr. Speaker, earlier this month the Parkland Institute released a report on the Public Service Cuts in the Northwest Territories titled “Economic Imperative or Political Choice?”

This report contains a significant amount of information and points of view that are often contrary to those opinions supported by the Ministers and the GNWT Public Service. Personally, I don't believe that the Government's financial position is as positive as that suggested within the Parkland Report. However, I also don't believe that the financial situation is as dire as suggested by Cabinet. In truth, the reality lies somewhere in between the two. It's clear that a course correction is required. However, I'm not convinced that the course being pursued by Cabinet is the most appropriate for the people of the NWT.

A clear example of this is demonstrated within the Parkland Report. The Report suggests that the GNWT should place a greater emphasis on collecting additional revenues rather than cutting public service jobs and programs. While I disagree with the report that increasing personal taxes and fuel taxes would be a reasonable method to increase these revenues, I do agree that pursuing additional revenue is critical for the long term future of the GNWT.

I believe that an opportunity for increased revenue that must be pursued is the acquisition of Federal money owed to the NWT for Indian and Inuit Healthcare Costs. It is estimated that the Federal

Government owes the GNWT approximately \$95 Million dollars to help offset the costs of providing health care to the indigenous Aboriginal people of the NWT. This money is owed to the government of the NWT and must be collected.

Given this Government's fiscal realities delays in the collection of these dollars are no longer responsible. I believe that the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Finance should make the collection of these dollars a top priority. Further, a long term funding agreement needs to be developed which ensures the continued delivery of health care to Aboriginal people in the NWT. This agreement must further recognize the ever increasing costs of healthcare in the NWT and Canada.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will be asking the Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services questions concerning the Department's inability to collect these urgently required Federal dollars, the status of negotiations and where the Department is with the development of a long-term funding model to flow future dollars.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.