

**Thinking outside of the Box**

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last Tuesday while discussing Capital investments within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment I made some comments on two projects I felt were missing within the 2009/2010 Capital Plan. Specifically, J.H. Sisson's School and a Yellowknife Campus for Aurora College. For clarity, I want to point out that I am not requesting that the GNWT turn J.H. Sisson's into the new Yellowknife Campus or that Sisson's be shut down. There is no evidence, in my opinion, to suggest that such an action would be appropriate. No research, that I'm aware of, has been done. And, for the record I re-confirmed with the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment that the Department has no plans in place to shut down any schools in Yellowknife.

My statement on Tuesday was intended to encourage the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to **think outside of the box** and consider all avenues to address our Capital/Infrastructure needs. As a Government spending public dollars we must look for ways to maximize the dollars we spend and ensure that we get the best results for our investments. I mentioned Sisson only because I was already talking about Sisson's School as a project that has fallen off the Capital Plan. I'm sorry for any stress that my reference to Sisson's may have caused to parents, teachers and students.

However, currently Sisson's is part of a much larger problem, the problem of enrolment. Yellowknife is faced with rapidly declining enrolments. Running schools that are only half filled increase costs significantly. High costs per student in facilities operating with low enrolment actually take dollars out of programs for children. Money which

could be used to enhance programming (like immersion programs) if the system better utilized space resources. My first concern is the education of our youth. I want this government to enhance programming that will give our youth the best results and prepare them for the world and their future in it. Enrolment in Yellowknife has continuously dropped since 2002/2003 from 3,751 to 3,462 in 2008/2009. Projected numbers for 2009/2010 are even lower at 3,380.

Mr. Speaker, we: the resident of the NWT, the residents of Yellowknife, Members of the Legislative Assembly and local Public School Boards, will be faced with significant challenges (many of which are financial) over the coming years. Hard decisions will need to be made; decisions will be required but cannot be done in the absence of research. Hard questions need to be asked.

I am committed to working with all interested stakeholders to find reasonable and responsible solutions. Solutions that work in the best interest of Northerners. This will require individuals to ask hard, and occasionally controversial, questions. For the sake of the children and their quality education, I am willing to ask hard questions so that all relevant information can be collected to help decision-makers make informed and responsible decisions. Mr. Speaker, I will continue to encourage this Government to Think Outside the Box and challenge the status quo.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker