

MEMBER'S STATEMENT – GREAT SLAVE – October 22, 2008

YELLOWKNIFE COMMUNITY WELLNESS COALITION

Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

Yellowknife's natural surroundings, and safe, small town atmosphere are things that make our capital city unique. Sadly, in recent years, this sense of security is no longer the case. We are experiencing an increase in break and enters, drug trafficking. The popular Frame Lake walking trail has become the scene of violent crimes.

Some proactive citizens have created the Yellowknife Community Wellness Coalition, (YCWC) a community policing organization made up of trained volunteers. Their Citizens on Patrol is a neighbourhood watch service that acts as eyes and ears only – observers who report suspicious or dangerous behaviour to the RCMP. These are things we can all do to be community minded.

Thanks to contributions from municipal, territorial and federal governments, the Wellness Coalition's Community Service Patrol has leased a van to drive through Yellowknife picking people up and bringing them to safe places to stay, be it their homes or one of the shelters. This service is crucial in the winter for people's personal safety and in the summer for collective safety downtown.

Mr. Speaker, what I am seeing here is a vicious cycle: needy people are taken to shelters which are already crowded and financially stretched. When these places reach capacity or can only provide a limited range of services, the same people who were brought there are forced on to the streets again. Many of them gather in places, such as the bush along the Frame Lake Trail, on the rocks behind Sir John Franklin High School and

on Tin Can Hill. It's hard to go for a walk in Yellowknife's green spaces without coming across someone's campsite. These people often struggle with addictions and their desperate condition makes them more susceptible to injury and disease, increased addiction that in turn leads to more crime.

Services like our shelters and the Yellowknife Community Wellness Coalition rely on the dedicated efforts of volunteers. To avoid burnout, they need to increase their number of personnel and provide more training, but are unable due to limited funding to the voluntary sector. The Department of Justice has shown a lot of support for the Wellness Coalition, but more help is needed to continue their services. They need a small amount of office space, a part time coordinator and fuel for their van.

We need to examine where we are putting our dollars. We need to break the vicious cycle. Organizations like the Tree of Peace need support to attain their mandate to assist people from small communities to make the transition to Yellowknife. We need to fund programs that are already working and help people who are already helping. We need to feel secure enough to be able to give tips to the RCMP without fearing for our personal safety.

Mr. Speaker, we all want a capital city that is clean and safe. We should be able to enjoy its unique character and step outdoors to see the northern lights or the sun set after midnight without being afraid.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time, I will be asking the Justice Minister some questions about community wellness and policing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These are questions for the Justice Minister.

1. Given our mandate to increase safety and security in our communities, would the Minister commit to renewing funding to the Yellowknife Community Wellness Coalition so that they are able to maintain their current level of services?
2. Would the Department of Justice consider core funding to the Yellowknife Community Wellness Coalition, so that they would be able to hire a coordinator, provide further training to their membership and promote their organization?
3. We see a lot of people coming into Yellowknife from the smaller communities, for many different reasons and experience difficulties. To help fulfill our mandate not only to increase safety, but also to address addictions, would the Minister look into how organizations like Tree of Peace are being supported and how they allocate their funding. I am aware that they offer some addictions programs, but will the Minister look at how they might also address the issue of security, giving people a safe place to drop in during the day, maybe have a cup of coffee, find out about the choices and opportunities that are available to them in Yellowknife.
4. Would the Minister commit to working with the RCMP to possibly increase the number of patrols on the Frame Lake Trail or make a

patrol schedule available to the public, so that we might feel more secure, knowing when there will be police presence out there?