

Small Community Employment

Mr. Speaker, labour market outcomes in small NWT communities continue to lag. At the beginning of the 18th Legislative Assembly, the Government of the Northwest Territories made a commitment to develop and implement a strategy to increase employment in small communities.

The Small Community Employment Support program provides \$4.2 million in GNWT funding to expand employment and training opportunities in small communities. This includes an additional \$3 million we agreed to put into the program when the last budget was approved.

I want to state for the record, Mr. Speaker, that this is money for small communities and that is where we are going to spend it. That is not spending in Yellowknife and not in the regional centres.

Program uptake has been slow, Mr. Speaker, and we were starting to take steps to ensure this money meant to create employment would be spent by extending it to regional centres. We have since heard from Regular MLAs that they want to see the money refocused on small communities, and that is what we will do.

Our commitment to creating jobs and training opportunities in small communities remains strong, Mr. Speaker, and we will be much more proactive in finding ways to spend this money in the communities it was intended for.

Earlier this year, we announced that our government would establish a Committee on Rural and Remote Communities that would include six Regular MLAs that represent the NWT's small communities. This committee, which will also include three representatives

from Cabinet, will be an important source of advice and ideas on how the GNWT can better support and help residents in our small communities.

We will be looking to this committee for innovative and proactive ideas about how best to use the money identified for small community employment to make a real difference for the communities and the people they represent, Mr. Speaker. We will also make more efforts to work with community leaders to find out what needs to be done in their communities and how we can use this funding to do that.

Mr. Speaker, creating jobs and employment is an issue that all Northerners care about. This program targeted at small communities is just one of many initiatives and programs our government has in place to support job growth and employment.

Federal labour market agreements offer an additional \$7.2 million to support employment, training and skills development across the NWT, including in small communities. As part of our current discussions with the federal government, ECE will continue to focus on ensuring that renewed bilateral agreements provide enough flexibility to support labour market development programming and initiatives in small communities.

By working together with all our partners, we can make a difference for the unemployed residents of our small communities.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.