

Additional Financial Support during Extended Evacuation

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Premier to announce two new government policies on how the Government of the Northwest Territories supports residents who have been evacuated from their communities for extended periods of time and the communities that support them.

As of May 24th, nearly 2,000 people from Hay River and the Kát'odeeche First Nation Reserve have registered as evacuees in Yellowknife, with additional evacuees staying in other NWT communities including Enterprise, Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, and Fort Smith. Currently, residents who must evacuate their home community receive transportation, meals, and accommodation at evacuation centers. Income Assistance clients are provided emergency funds of \$500.00 to \$1,000.00.

However, we know that not everyone is eligible for support through Income Assistance and being away from home can result in unexpected expenses that are particularly challenging for those who experience an interruption to their income.

Today, the Government of the Northwest Territories is launching two new programs to support registered evacuees and community governments: the Evacuee Income Disruption Support program and the Community Government Hosting Evacuees Grant.

The Evacuee Income Disruption Support program assists individuals who have lost income due to recent community evacuations. This program aims to provide targeted financial relief during evacuations.

The Evacuee Income Disruption Support program is available to all NWT residents who are subject to an evacuation order of over seven days and have suffered a loss of income because their employment has been interrupted due to the evacuation order.

Eligible individuals will receive a one-time payment of \$750. With yesterday's announcement from the Town of Hay River, many evacuees are now planning to return home. Still, I assure those residents that if their income has been interrupted, they will still be eligible for this program, even if they have returned home. Information on how to apply is available on our website and on the GNWT Facebook page.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important that we support our community governments at this time, most notably the Town of Hay River, the Kát'odeeche First Nation, and communities that have welcomed residents since evacuation orders were issued on May 14.

We understand that some evacuees have chosen not to come to Yellowknife for a variety of reasons and were being supported by other communities in the South Slave and the Dehcho. We commend these communities for taking in, feeding, and supporting evacuees during such a challenging period.

In order to assist communities who have been unable to secure funding from other sources, the GNWT is launching the Community Government Hosting Evacuees Grant, which is a grant designed to help eligible community governments cover costs associated with supporting registered evacuees, including staffing, lodging, meals, and the provision of essential services.

Municipal and Community Affairs Minister Shane Thompson has already sent letters to relevant communities advising them of this funding, which is separate from what is provided to communities operating official evacuation centres. Communities seeking the Community Government Hosting Evacuees Grant will have up to 30 days from the date the Evacuation Order is lifted and/or community residents are able to return home, to apply for a grant through this program.

We announced both programs today, and more information is available for residents and community governments on the GNWT website or our GNWT Facebook page.

We know this wildfire season is going to be challenging. The evacuation event for Hay River and Kát'odeeche First Nation serves as a reminder to us all to do everything we can to be ready for emergencies. This includes being prepared for evacuations on short notice and, wherever possible, having plans in place to safeguard your personal health and safety and economic wellbeing, as well as for your family members and pets.

This is an exceptionally challenging period for many NWT residents and we must continue to lean on each other in the days and weeks ahead. NWT residents and communities have this government's full support.

The GNWT is incredibly grateful to the community and the residents of Yellowknife, who have welcomed so many evacuees with open arms, and open hearts. I also want to thank everyone involved in supporting evacuees at the Multiplex here in Yellowknife and in Enterprise, Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, and Fort Smith, and in any other communities that have welcomed evacuees. Your compassion and time have not gone unnoticed. Further, on May 18, the GNWT announced its commitment to supporting fire evacuees from Hay River and Kát'odeeche First Nation through a donation matching program through the United Way NWT. The GNWT is matching donations up to \$150,000, providing critical assistance to those affected by the ongoing community evacuations. One hundred percent of donations raised through United Way NWT's 2023 Wildfire Response fundraising campaign will go towards supporting evacuees. The community and corporate support we've seen for this campaign has been truly inspiring, and I want to thank donors for their generosity.

On behalf of the GNWT, I want to give our heartfelt thanks to the crews on the ground, pilots, air attack officers, and tanker base teams for their incredible support to combat these wildfires.

Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.