

Archive of City Blog

September to
December 2020

Cruising into Christmas 2020



Great Slave MLA Katrina Nokleby was one of dozens of volunteers from all walks of life who took the time to staff kettles this year.

The Salvation Army of Yellowknife is so very close to hitting its Kettle Campaign target for 2020. In a final push, volunteers will be out at five locations from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. today.

Since starting in mid-November, the organization has reached 95-per-cent of its goal of \$44,000.

“We need approximately \$2100 to make it,” Jason Brinson, executive director and associate corps officer, told me this week.

“We are so incredibly thankful for those who have supported our Kettle Campaign this year. Donors and volunteers have made it possible for us to continue supporting our neighbours who rely on the vital services and programs that we provide.”

I am one of those volunteers again this year, having pulled several of the two-hour shifts. People are so gracious and generous as they pass the Kettle locations. Many also offer thanks for what the Salvation Army has done for them, or someone they know.

And with the new internet banking feature, people can make quick no-touch donations of \$5 for each tap of their bank card. Many folks have found that to be a welcome addition this year.

The locations are: Walmart, the Liquor Shop uptown; the Liquor Store downtown; Co-op; and Canadian Tire.

My final shift for 2020 is from 11 a.m. to noon at the uptown alcohol outlet. I'm digging out my Santa hat and ugly Christmas sweater.

SIPPING INTO THE SEASON

The year 2020 has indeed been an annus horribilis for the local business industry. Well, I'll caveat that. For the city's small businesses. Especially the service and hospitality sectors.

Through no fault of their own, restaurants and bars have been decimated by public health restrictions and general public fear surrounding the global pandemic.

So anything that can be done to help the folks who make life in the North more enjoyable is certainly welcome.

Enter the #ShopYK Holiday Drink Contest brought to you by the fine folks at the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce.

It's a pretty simple scheme, which began earlier this month, designed to drive traffic into the seven participating businesses and then generate promotion online.

Here's how it works:

- To be eligible to win one of three, \$100 gift-cards, snap a photo of a holiday drink in front of you and post it on social media using #ShopYK. You'll automatically be entered to win.
- Or, to help a business be awarded Best Holiday Drink of 2020 and receive an official plaque (and bragging rights!), vote online [here](#).

Vote for your favourite until Jan. 3, 2021.

My goal between Christmas and New Year's is to try them all. Now that's my goal.

I also plan to make some resolutions for 2021. We'll see how that goes.

But I will at least enter the contest #ShopYK Holiday Drink Contest a couple of times.

Cheers!

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

This is not my year-end blog, just a pre-Christmas offering.

For those of you who celebrate the season, enjoy. Especially if it has some true religious significance for you.

While I'm not at all a Grinch, I haven't objected as I've watched the 'miracle' of the season slowly fade from my life over the years. It's to the point now where I'll text a few close friends tomorrow. Maybe a phone call or two.

And, of course, a round of greetings on social media.

No more presents that need to be bought, although I don't mind that so much. Certainly no more cards to be mailed. Any of my older relatives who followed that tradition have passed. Sadly, two of them did so this year.

I have strung up some twinkling lights on my balcony railing this year. And I bought myself a nice present.

Ho, ho. ho.

Posted on

December 24, 2020

Tags

#ShopYK, Christmas Edit

NOTES/QUOTES

#25: Crack; crime, crap; and city council



*This photo has nothing to do with the content of this blog. It's just a picture I took last week of the lovely holiday display erected each year by Great Slave Helicopters on Old Airport Road. In the newspaper biz, this is called a *standup* or *standalone photo*. Not related to a story, it's just accompanied by a caption. Now, on to the serious stuff...*

“I want to speak about the violent impact of crack cocaine. I want to ... urge this government to do everything within its power to prevent this dangerous drug from taking hold on our communities.” — *Henry Zoe, North Slave MLA, March 2005.*

“The NWT is fighting a crack epidemic and losing terribly. Time to recognize addictions as a public health issue and not a criminal one.” — *Rylund Johnson, Yellowknife North MLA, November 2020*

Decriminalizing hard drugs such as cocaine? Are you on crack?

Yellowknife is not Vancouver and while illegal opioid use is rampant in the NWT, alcohol abuse is still the worst addiction. Booze abuse leads to violence in the home and on the streets. It also fills up our court dockets and hospital beds.

And alcohol is legal to consume for adults.

We saw this year the introduction of a long-discussed managed alcohol program — where street alcoholics can obtain limited doses of liquor to stave off withdrawal and consumption of non-beverage alcohol such as mouthwash — but that's where experiments in other forms of harm-reduction should end up here.

Why? Many of those people seeking out cocaine and its solid crack derivative need to come into contact with the law in order to get the type of slap-in-the-face wake-up call to seek counselling and recovery.

Cokeheads are also enabling organized crime to import the drug into the territory. Police often need to be able to find the dealers by surveilling the users. Or by flipping them after being busted.

I fail to see how the decriminalization of drug use would do anything to help addicts or stem the level of criminality associated with the drug trade.

But I'm not Rylund Johnson.

While the rookie Yellowknife North MLA has brought forth some fresh ideas during his time in the 19th NWT Legislative Assembly, he also has followed some unusual rabbits down some odd holes.

Vancouver City Council recently unanimously voted to seek a pass from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and be the first city to legalize possession of illicit drugs for personal use. This follows similar moves in some 'progressive' jurisdictions on the American left-coast.

In light of Vancouver's move, Johnson posted a tweet stating the NWT was "fighting a crack epidemic and losing terribly" and suggested decriminalization should be considered.

Stated his tweet:

"Drug supply lines didn't even flinch during Covid. Seems we're more likely to run out of food and toilet paper before crack. Time to recognize addictions as a public health issue and not a criminal one."

Parts of Canada are in the grips of an opioid crisis: heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine and, of course, crack. There is also a huge problem with methamphetamine, a synthetic stew of amphetamine and other random and dangerous chemicals.

There have been two deaths in separate NWT communities this month attributed to fentanyl, bringing the total dead from that drug in the past five years to 11.

Job losses, general inactivity and depression surrounding COVID-19 public health restrictions have only fuelled some people's futile race to escape reality and secure a sense of well-being or euphoria. And they are willing to break the law to do it.

In a post-tweet interview with Cabin Radio, MLA Johnson said:

“Crack use has been consistently rising in the territory and we have an addictions problem.

“There’s just so much stigma around drug abuse. The amount of crack, it’s been consistently expanding into more and more communities.

“People are justing starting to really even be comfortable talking about the problem.”

“Everywhere should be doing this, but there’s no appetite from the federal government to have meaningful decriminalization conversation.

“It falls on other (levels) of government to step up and say that the criminal justice system is costing us too much money, it’s costing us too many lives, and it just doesn’t work.”

The NWT’s deputy chief public health officer, Andy Delli Pizzi, told Cabin Radio current statistics on crack cocaine use in the territory don’t suggest there is an epidemic. He did leave

the door open to considering decriminalization of illicit drugs if the situations worsened.

“But for right now, the NWT really is focusing on preventing harms from alcohol,” he told Cabin.

That’s what I see from the public gallery in Yellowknife courtrooms week after week. Alcohol is wrecking so many lives in the NWT, as many residents seek solace from the inter-generational trauma associated with colonization decades ago.

And alcohol is legal. But cocaine is not.

I do wonder how the drug can so readily be brought into the territory.

From what I hear in court, a lot of it is simply driven up into Yellowknife on the only highway into the capital. Sure, there are many other ways to slip into the vast land, with a few secondary roadways and its many waterways, wet or frozen. But a huge impact could be had with a few regular RCMP roadblocks set up at random points along Highway 3.

There should also be the threat of police checks of luggage on inter-territorial air flights.

Simplistic? Sure. But has it been done? Not a lot, from what I've been able to ascertain.



Items recovered — including drugs and guns — after arrests made in connection with a 2018 Thanksgiving weekend burglary at a home in Yellowknife, part of Project Gloomiest. Photo courtesy of RCMP.

Yes, there have been some very successful police undercover operations — Project Green Manalishi and Project Gloomiest come to mind — but how about taking the concept of the seasonal Operation Gingerbread to catch impaired drivers to a year-long program to screen vehicles for cocaine?

Yes, it would cost money and divert RCMP from other duties. But the GNWT could do that. After all, what has the GNWT done since 2005 to take real action on cracking the cocaine problem?

What has it done since Henry Zoe urged the government of the day “to do everything within its power to prevent this dangerous drug from taking hold on our communities,” across the NWT?

I’ll leave you with words often spoken by judges as they sentence drug dealers. In this case, it was Supreme Court Justice Shannon Smallwood in 2018. But it could have been 2019, 2020 or last week:

“It has been said many times that the drug trade (trafficking in cocaine and crack cocaine) has had a devastating effect on the people in

Yellowknife and elsewhere in the Northwest Territories.

“Cocaine has destroyed lives. People become addicted to this drug. They commit crimes to get money to purchase cocaine. They will traffic in cocaine to support their addiction.

“While under the influence of cocaine other offences are committed often. And cocaine is often sold to those that are the most vulnerable, those who are most in need of help, and those that traffic in cocaine contribute directly to plague of cocaine addiction. They prey on the most vulnerable members of the community for profit.”

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INTERESTING INSIGHT FROM INUVIK

Much has been said by many people over what it will take to get people both off drugs and away from crime of all types in the NWT. In the recent edition of the *Inuvik Drum*, editor Eric Bowling addressed concerns apparently raised by readers over local court coverage.

You see, for many years, that small paper did not regularly cover the court circuit. The journalists at the single-person bureaus posted there showed no interest and the bosses at the Northern News Services Ltd. home office in Yellowknife offered little direction.



Images for collage sourced from NNSL.com

But Bowling has been writing up even the most minor of crimes dealt with in Territorial Court in Inuvik. I suspect he has discovered a ready supply of content that his successors simply eschewed in favour of scraping up features in the regional hub of 3,400.

But I digress.

In his editorial — I also disagree with reporters writing opinion pieces, but to explore that ethical issue would be another digression — Bowling did offer some insightful reasoning on how to address what brings people before the courts in the first place:

If people want to see the number of convictions go down, they need to address the problems at their sources.

That means ensuring proper funding for early childhood education and on-the-land programming, as well as counselling and career guidance, at the public school level. That means more work with teaching traditional knowledge and language so people can experience continuity between their heritage and their current world.

That means funding addiction support programs that don't require someone to uproot and leave the territory for therapy. That means funding community programming to help people getting their lives on track keep occupied, find meaning in their lives and discover ways they can positively contribute. That means providing accessible jobs and affordable housing so people can take control of their lives.

One thing that has become obvious to me in my time covering court is just about everyone who has run afoul of the law actually wants to be a productive citizen. They just need the tools to get there.

That coincides with the basic mantra I've also been offering over time about how to reduce crime starting at a very young age: Proper parenting, cultural/recreation activities, a good education, job opportunities and hope. It really

comes down to the wide areas of education and jobs. They provide the tools to make good early choices and to have self-respect as an adult. Education and jobs need to be the main focus of the GNWT, to the exclusion of most else.

And for goodness sakes, I hope the political infighting seen in this and the previous Assembly is over. It isn't helping anyone. It's time to make the best of the situation and dance with the one who brought ya, folks.

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NOVEL 'RONA TEST NOT A WASTE

I was both startled and encouraged to hear the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer found traces of COVID-19 in samples of Yellowknife's sewage.

Samples collected between Nov. 30 and Dec. 2 “signalled undetected Covid-19,” Chief Public Health Officer Dr Kami Kandola said in an advisory issued Dec. 9.

Anyone who was self-isolating in Yellowknife since November 30 until present should have a COVID-19 test, stated an advisory that subsequently lit up my phone from local media notifications.

Essential services workers who were in Yellowknife between November 30 and now, who received exemptions to work should also be tested.

“The Office of the Chief Public Health Officer is confident that this positive signal indicates that there is likely an undetected case of COVID-19 in Yellowknife,” stated the advisory.

“It is possible that this signal is from one or more individuals who have travelled and who are now appropriately self-isolating, or have even left the territory. But it is also possible that COVID-19 has been transmitted to others.

“Currently, there is not enough information to confidently assess public risk.”

Wastewater is collected from the City of Yellowknife regularly. In these results, public health can see if COVID-19 is present or absent. They are also able to compare the amount of virus in the wastewater with any cases identified in a community to determine whether there is more present than would be expected.

This allows public health to take wastewater results which are out-of-the-ordinary, and target proactive surveillance on those who have

recently travelled to identify other cases of COVID-19.

Currently, the NWT's largest risk for COVID-19 comes from individuals who have travelled outside the NWT since all cases thus far have been linked to travel. There have been 20 confirmed cases as of today, Dec. 13.

So I take away two things from this news: The GNWT is doing a very good job in maintaining a firewall between the virus and the people; and everyone really needs to think twice before deciding on travelling outside of the NWT.

To allow us to enjoy a comparatively restriction-free lifestyle in the NWT, we need to stop bringing the damn thing over the border. So stop travelling, unless there is an ultra-compelling need to do so.

I cancelled a planned social trip to Manitoba this month as that place is over-run with the 'Rona and I am bright enough to realize the risk is to high. Now if I needed to go to Edmonton for medical reasons, for example, I would do so and then follow the self-isolation protocols upon my return.

The thought that there was someone in the city with an undetected case of the virus was curious. And a bit creepy. But they apparently followed the rules and all went well.

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NOT 'IN CAMERA,' ON CAMERA

The increased use of online meetings has changed the way society functions. This includes how our policymakers appear in public.

While most folks are digitally aware enough to avoid committing a 'Toobin' while on a Zoom call, who hasn't seen people eating, sipping, scratching or just being distracted when they wouldn't have done so during a regular meeting in a board-room.

Images have been tilted, off colour, too bright or very dark. Sound can be a whisper or over-modulated. And then, there is always the forgotten mute button.

“Can you hear me?”

“Yes ... yes I can.”

The level of competency with the online meetings seems to decrease as the participants' ages increase. The professional presentation also

seems to decrease in concert with the level of government.

Which brings me to last Yellowknife City Council meeting. The virtual meetup on Monday night was to approve the city's 2021 budget.

While I applaud council for whittling down a potential 11.92-per-cent tax hike to 2.5 per cent — including transferring about \$1 million to the capital fund for upcoming costly capital projects — I found the pols' on-camera presentation to be pretty pitiful.

C'mon folks, pick up your game.

Invest in some rudimentary lighting, or at least make sure you aren't backlit. Frame yourself properly. Look at what will be seen in the

background. Pay attention when others are speaking.

And realize that although you might be sitting in your basement, use language that would be appropriate in council chambers in front of a live gallery. Don't use terms such as "people are going to get a shit scare next year," and "we'll still get crapped on."

Be aware you are on camera.

I think this one image showing seven of eight council members, plus a thirsty Mayor Rebecca Alty and City Administrator Sheila Bassi-Kellett — shown exactly as presented on the city's livestream — is worth 1,000 more of my words:



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UPDATE: *After posting this blog, I refreshed the piece on COVID-19 testing.*

Posted on

December 14, 2020

Tags

courts, COVID-19, Crime, GNWT, NWTpoli Edit

NOTES/QUOTES

**#24: High time for
head shops; more
'Rona ruminations;
and some other
delights**



igns, signs? Nowhere was a sign last week at the city's new pot shop. There is Liquor Store lettering in the background, no Trailblazers in the foreground.

Good grief, James, were have you been? No blog for weeks. Did you have the 'Rona?

Nope, no coronavirus, I've just been busy doing other things. After my volunteer and professional work is done, I've just been out of time and energy to blog.

In fact, I'm falling behind the work needed to keep the Rotary Club of Yellowknife website up to date. It's a very busy group, indeed, and I am determined to document all of the members' good deeds. Such as the recent Rotary Wreaths campaign.



Volunteers from Joint Task Force North help Rotary Club of Yellowknife members distribute hundreds of boxes across the city on Friday. The annual Rotary Wreaths campaign is a major fundraiser for the service club. More than 400 of the decorated \$50 balsam fir wreaths imported from Nova Scotia sold out.

So, coming out of this blog fog, I do have a notebook brimming full of ideas, notions, half-thoughts and second-thoughts for bits and pieces of blogs.

Hence, the Notes and Quotes format today.

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HIGH TIME FOR HEAD SHOPS

It's a Christmas miracle as the GNWT allows private weed stores to open.

Clearly, it's a sign the territory's populace hasn't suffered from collective refer madness since the demon weed was physically made legally available in October 2018. That's when the uptown Liquor Shop — the only store where

people in Yellowknife could buy cannabis — sold out of stock the first day of sale.

Two private retail cannabis stores have just been given permission by the GNWT to open in the capital, with contractors being sought to open cannabis stores in Inuvik, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, Norman Wells, and Hay River.

As Cabin Radio reported, ReLeaf NT will be located at 5123 51 Street while Trailblazers Cannabis Shop will be at 100 Borden Drive (next to the existing uptown Liquor Shop).

Both outlets were selected following requests for proposals issued by the territorial government, a frustratingly slow process that began in April 2019.

When the federal government moved to legalize pot in 2018, Edward Eggenberger — owner of uptown’s Liquor Shop and downtown’s Liquor Store — split off part of the uptown location for what was clearly going to be the territory’s first head shop.

However, the place stood empty as weed sales were squeezed into a corner of the busy booze store while the GNWT got its permitting act together.

Now I get it. The government is understandably concerned over increasing the availability of an intoxicant in a jurisdiction already wracked with addictions issues. But legal weed is designed to be a safely produced alternative to the unknown baggies of bud peddled on the black market. And it allows the government to pick some revenue from the pockets of organized crime.

I am perplexed by the ban on advertising and the federal requirements for plain packaging on the wide array of cannabis products being offered for the first time — and often sold to older folks who perhaps haven't gotten high on THC since high school.

As I have been volunteering each year for the Salvation Army's Kettle Drive, one of my favourite locations to choose was the uptown Liquor Shop. It allowed me to observe for lengthy periods of time how weed sales were doing, what type of folks were buying the once verboten plant, and what the general level of knowledge was in the product by both the staff and the consumers.



If I have to wear a mask, I'm gonna wear a N95 version. Here I am waiting for donations last week at the Liquor Shop in the strip mall on Borden Drive in the uptown area of Yellowknife.

At first, it was rough. Clearly the staff didn't have a good understanding of the often minute differences in the cannabis products —

something a clerk at a real pot shop would spend hours doing ‘research’ on. And having the products on display in one corner of the store, but then requiring it to be picked up at the cash checkout line, was a clumsy process that just slowed the whole retail experience down. Yes, it was a bummer at times.

But last week, traffic was down in the Liquor Shop, but a steady stream of folks still showed up at the registers asking for weed. They are told to go next door. Some didn’t seem to immediately grasp the concept. A few showed genuine fear when they only heard the first line from the cashier: “We don’t sell it *here* any more ...” before they finish the sentence: “you have to go *next door*.”

The issue right now is there is absolutely no signage outside to indicate there is a new outlet. None. Not even a sign inside the existing Liquor

Shop. And I haven't seen any advertisements informing folks of the move. Something I would think the owner would want to do, as the new Trailblazers Cannabis Shop is very nicely set up and would be a sure draw for new sales — if people new about it.

From the outside, the place does indeed conform to regulations for a standalone cannabis shop:

To help limit youth exposure to cannabis products, the federal government requires that cannabis products not be visible from either outside of a venue or internally.

Check, yes. But, I would think just the name of the place on the existing above-door backlit signage would be appropriate.

After all, the name Trailblazers does conform with the naming rules:

Store names must comply with federal legislation and regulations respecting advertising and promotion. Store names must be in good taste and may not promote intoxication. Terms and images such as, but not limited to “chronic” “stoned” or “high” will not be permitted.

But for all of those folks who do partake in cannabis, it’s a heady, happy time. And I maintain the NWT would be a less criminally violent place if more folks got high on pot than drunk on booze. Yup, just pass the dutchie ‘pon the left hand side.

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KUDOS TO DR. KAMI ET AL

When you take a stand, you have to be ready to defend your position. When you are proven wrong, you need to be able to admit it.

I admit I was partially in error with my overly harsh criticisms of the GNWT's response in the first months to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, on May 24, I wrote this:

I am certainly not calling for all precautions detailed in the GNWT's Emerging Wisely plan to be lifted, as it's obvious we need to control travel into the NWT, to protect our virus-free bubble as best we can.

But as for the restrictions to businesses and gatherings, the one question that I have not heard being put to Premier Cochrane is: What will be different in our situation here, inside the

NWT, at the end of the year that is different from right now? For example, why can restaurant dining rooms and movie theatres open in a month or so, but not now?

And the answer to my question is? Well, we could have been living pretty free and easy inside the territory all these months. But I can also see the wisdom in keeping us in a defensive posture, waiting for the despicable little Coronocreature to breach our border walls and self-isolation protocols.

I can see this now, as the rest of North America is fighting to keep its collective head above the second wave of the pandemic — something that I scoffed at even being a possibility a few months ago — the NWT is fairing very well. We have had 15 people testing positive as of this writing. All have been quarantined and treated or

recovered and we have had no widespread community transmission.

The cases have involved people returning from travel, with some then spreading it among close contacts in the homes. But as folks have been following the self-isolation plans upon returning to the NWT, we can pretty much go about our lives without much fear of getting the SARS-CoV-2 virus. And with the work exemptions for mines and other industries keeping those out-of-territory folks from interacting with locals, our 'Rona-free bubble remains intact.

But look how fast COVID-19 spread in Nunavut. A few weeks ago, there were no identified victims. As of this writing, there are 206 people with positive test results.

The firewall at our border has worked so far. And we have been able to sort of live freely

since June in the NWT's Phase Two of relaxing the initial shutdown under public health restrictions.

Yes, it's a pain having a maximum of 25 people being able to gather and it's a real burden for businesses having to deal with capacity limits and other sanitary measures. (Thankfully, there are some taxpayer-funded government relief programs.)

But I still think restrictions could be further eased right now, maybe not to Phase 3, but certainly a 'Phase 2.5.' This situation could go on until March or April before enough people are vaccinated up here. If the closed-border regimen is working, why can't we enjoy it a bit more?



Cochrane and Kandola during a committee meeting last week, providing updates on the pandemic restrictions and overall situation. Screen grab from assembly livestream.

But congrats overall are in order for Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Kami Kandola, Premier Caroline Cochrane and Health and Social Services Diane Thom. They have been quite transparent with the information provided — let's set aside the whole Covid Secretariat debacle for now — and it comes with regular live updates and always available online.

I saw this comment from Jim Phelan on Cochrane's Facebook page about 'Rona-related info she posted :

“For those who criticize you listen to what they are saying and factor that into your decision making process. Equally as important to listening to those who are educated. As top elected official you can't leave any of your constituents out of your scope of considerations. From my perspective you're doing an excellent job. Old friend keep your eyes on the ball. Trust your instincts.”

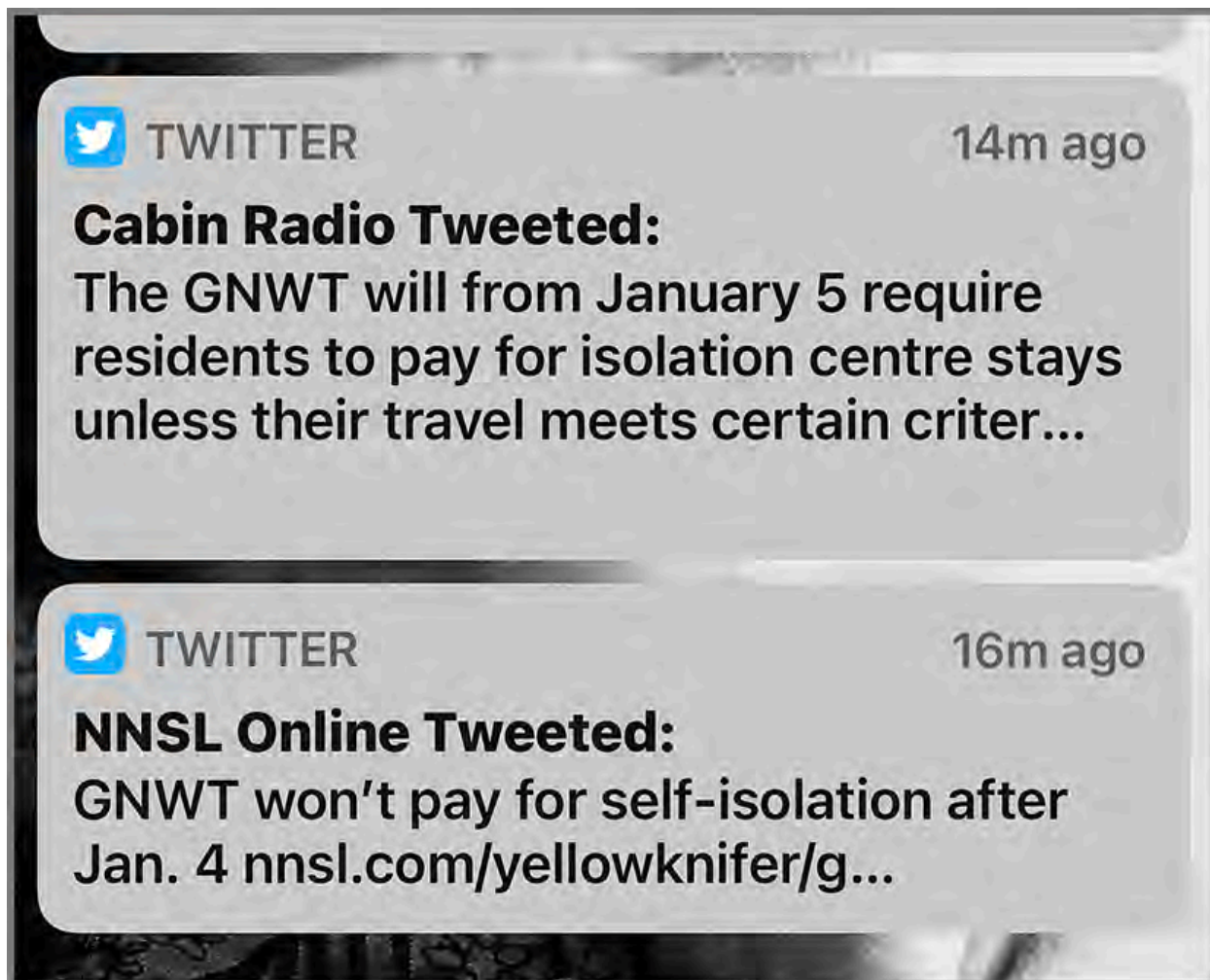
However, there will come a time when we see the first vaccines showing up in the North and that will be when Cochrane will have to weigh the competing demands from her CPHO and the business community, parents of students and sports groups to drop the restrictions so regular life can resume. Of course, the doctor will

always err on the side of caution — likely to the extreme. That's when we need political leadership. No aspect of life is without risk.

We will need to get back to our old routines as soon as possible — once the most vulnerable people have had a shot. We will live with the SARS-CoV-2 virus as we do with the seasonal flu virus and other diseases we immunize ourselves against in our lifetimes. We need to allow our kids to interact freely again, our businesses to drive the economy once more and everyone to be able to enjoy this relatively short time we all have on this planet.

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MEDIA TEDIUM



Above are two alerts I received on my phone for tweets sent out following the GNWT's (right-headed) adjustment to self-isolation payment policy. Which is conveying the accurate message? I note the NNSL story did contain the correct information. But its tweet was just plain fake news.

Posted on

December 7, 2020

Tags

cannabis, COVID-19, GNWT, media, NWTpoli Edit

A side deal secures Side Door building for the homeless



A temporary fence has been erected between the Overlander Sports parking lot, at left, and the new Emergency Temporary Day Shelter.

“I’m at a solid hard-no on the Mine Rescue or former Side Door. I feel I can’t be proposed to come off that stance.” — *Yellowknife city Coun. Niels Konge*

“Locating a facility such as this, catering to the demographic that is experiencing homelessness and addictions, does not suit this location for the safety of our property, staff and clientele. — *Bill and Sandra Stirling, co-owners of Overlander Sports*

It appears the fear over the pandemic has stricken downtown businesses and residents once again. The first slap in the face came during the initial shutdown while public health officials mounted a plan to keep the ‘Rona at bay and

prevent any possible community spread should the little virus squeeze into the territory.

That sucked the life out of the city's core. As we neatly survived the initial wave of COVID-19, the businesses were allowed to re-open — sort of. But it really isn't the same for many.

I personally don't agree with many of the public health orders. If we had community spread of the virus, I would think otherwise. But we don't. We pretty much have a COVID-free bubble — 15 cases all year, all identified and traced, no spread — that we just aren't taking advantage of.

I know Premier Caroline Cochrane hates the term COVID-free bubble. Sorry, but I like it. It's what us writers call an a literary device. Or something like that.

The coronavirus is going to be with the world for some time. Maybe forever. As with the seasonal flu, we will have a vaccine that will help prevent most of us from getting it. But as with the seasonal flu, many people will get C-19 and some, sadly, will die.

We need to figure out how to live with this new disease. Right now, we are just hiding from it.

And it's not just the business community that is suffering.

Health Minister Julie Green told the NWT Legislative Assembly recently what we all suspected to be true, “that the incidents of intimate partner family violence are likely escalating during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

This in a place that already suffers the highest rates of violence against women in Canada.

The GNWT and its public health office must figure out how to keep the virus at bay at our borders, protect the most vulnerable people, especially in the smaller communities, while allowing the rest of us to make decisions on how much risk we are willing to accept in our daily lives.

But I digress. Back to the latest unnecessary bit of government boondoggery.

Despite the objections of many business owners and several city councillors, the GNWT has commandeered an empty building — smack in the middle of the most vibrant business area — to be used as a temporary day shelter to serve the needs of the city's homeless over winter.



“While there are many issues that keep me awake at night, this issue has been top of mind,” said Green.



Paulie Chinna, left, and Julie Green at Friday’s news conference. Sarah Pruijs/Cabin Radio

Earlier in the week, Chief Public Health Officer Dr Kami Kandola had [resisted using her own set of emergency powers](#) – provided by the Public Health Act during the pandemic – to intervene.

And what hours will the Emergency Temporary Day Shelter be open? Well, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs Paulie Chinna and Green announced it will follow business hours, of course, with its up to 25

clients starting at 7:30 a.m., and having to vacate the premises at 6:30 p.m. The GNWT figures 40 people have been displaced as a result of the COVID-19 public health measures at the existing shelter.

Mayor Rebecca Alty acknowledged councillors had rejected the original GNWT request, responding to businesses objections. But Alty told media she welcomed the GNWT's use of territorial emergency powers as a way to work around the city own red tape that would have prevented the GNWT from coming back with an ammended proposal for six months.

Now desperate times call for desperate measures, but this entire quagmire comes as the result of what I can only see as overly cautious capacity orders at the existing Day Shelter/ Sobering Centre of 50th Street. (The place has never really been named, on the original news

release it was referred to as a “joint sobering centre and day centre,” but that kinda sucks. Perhaps it should be named the Abernethy/ Moses Wet Shelter, named for the ministers who opened it at the time.)

While that existing facility — an experiment in combining a drop-in centre with a drunk tank, not usually seen in other communities — has been a major sore spot since it opened in 2017, at least people in the area have found ways to sort of co-exist with the often problematic clientele.

But what new headlines could be made as a result of the new temporary day shelter?

Some background, courtesy of Cabin Radio:

The NWT government declared a local state of emergency in Yellowknife on Friday (Nov. 6), using it to repurpose an empty downtown building as a day shelter for people experiencing homelessness. The Mine Rescue Building, rejected by city councillors as a day shelter location in August, has been co-opted by the NWT government using pandemic-related emergency powers.

A temporary shelter is needed because the existing shelter on 50 Street is operating at a reduced capacity owing to Covid-19 public health restrictions. The territory estimates 40 people have been displaced as a result.

That last line is the key. How many homeless people would ever possibly be exposed to COVID-19, what with the effective border closure and self-isolation plans? As a result of that plan, our very few cases have been

discovered and dealt with. No problem. No community spread. All involving people who have travelled, or people close to them who caught it when they got home.

How many homeless people are hopping on a plane to visit friends or family in southern Canada? I'd say none. How many homeless people are driving their vehicles to Alberta for some shopping in Edmonton? Again, likely none.

So why is the capacity at the shelter reduced at all? How small a chance would it be that a homeless person would come into contact with someone who had travelled and returned and not properly self-isolated? Super small. Same chances of a shelter employee not self-isolating if they were to travel outside of the NWT.



RCMP remove a panhandler who was yelling and swearing at the entrance to Shoppers Drug Mart earlier this year.

I also have to note the clients of the existing Day Shelter/Sobering Centre certainly do not socially distant when they are mingling outside, some engaging in the habit of day drinking. Or panhandling. Or just harassing passersby. Or shouting, swearing and fighting.

Go ahead. Tell me that doesn't happen. I live and work downtown.

And now, all of those problems are moving a few blocks closer to a key area in the business core.

In the media reports of the GNWT's state-of-emergency plan, there is mention of a fence being erected to protect customers and staff at the Overlander Sports store, which neighbours the Side Door Building/Emergency Temporary Day Shelter.

The lack of security staff patrolling the perimeter of the existing Day Shelter/Sobering Centre was a major problem that wasn't solved by the eventual use of casual patrols in the area by often young staff in crested windbreakers.



After a series of violent events and excessive day drinking, patrols were eventually set up to observe the streets and alleys surrounding the Day Shelter/Sobering Centre. These were not security guards.

As for the new shelter, Cabin Radio reported there will be “security in place during all hours of operation.” *Yellowknifer* reported the new

facility will “have at least five employees on site at all times and possibly more depending on decisions with patrolling staff.”

There is a huge difference between “security” and “patrolling staff.” At least the new temporary shelter is quite close to the Yellowknife RCMP detachment. That could act as a deterrent. Or at least reduce response times.

But hey, the Health and Social Services Authority will develop “a good neighbour agreement using lessons learned from the agreement from the current shelter,” reported *Yellowknifer*.

Lessons learned, indeed.

I understand there is a need to ensure people don't freeze in the dark recesses of buildings and

alleys during the frigid cold of our northern winter. But the GNWT created the problem itself with the extraordinary COVID-19 capacity measures at the existing shelter.

Health Minister Julie Green reportedly said the request to use emergency powers had come from the City of Yellowknife. She added that it was “fully supported by cabinet ministers.”

“While there are many issues that keep me awake at night, this issue has been top of mind,” Green was quoted as saying.

Her constituency is Yellowknife Centre. She fully supported the Day Shelter/Sobering Centre, despite concerns from many area businesses and residents, who have suffered personally and financially since it opened.



A woman lays unconscious after an assault caught on video by the owner of a neighbouring commercial block. Facebook page screen grab from Yellowknife Day Shelter Neighbours Group.

Green needs to work hard to champion a permanent solution for the chronic issues of trauma-induced substance abuse and homelessness in the city. The GNWT has recently stated it plans to open a new, permanent shelter in Yellowknife by 2023. This needs to be a major focus for her in her new position.

But 2023 is a long time from now. I am disgusted that the GNWT had not taken this route before, to finance a purpose-built facility. A new facility built in an area that will be accessible for the homeless, near public transit, not near a school, but a place that will not have a huge impact on the surrounding area.

Then, more transitional housing is needed for people who are ready for it; for people ready to re-build their lives. Providing day and night facilities for people who want to party on the street, but still need access to showers and food — and internet, I'm told — is a Band-Aid solution to a major, bleeding wound that has been a sore spot in the city for many years. It's shameful that successive groups of elected officials have simply punted the problem down the road.

The Arnica Inn transitional housing project was a really good example of what can be done in concert with a community group. But even that came after a fight with the GNWT.

Of course, the only real solution is to address the issues that drive people into distress. That drive them into the streets and on to the bottle and drugs. Mental health problems. Emotional trauma from the legacy of colonialism. Poor education, no jobs.

Yellowknife can't be seen as a welcoming place for all people on the margins of society in the NWT and Nunavut. It has to be seen as a relatively safe place, but one that will aggressively help people end the cycle of misery and despair.

When people come here on medical trips, they need to be returned home. When people are

brought here to deal with the justice system, they need to be returned to their home community where they can hopefully find supports from family and friends.

But above all, for the health of everyone in Yellowknife, the city has to be a place where the concerns of city councillors and the business community — yes, we are still in a market society, even in the federally supported North — are listened to and not bullied and bulldozed by a senior level of government.

I don't like it. It opens the door for more GNWT intrusion on the city's governance. Especially when this problem is one of the GNWT's own creation.

It's simply amazing how much time and expense has been wasted on this issue, given it all stems

from a public health order that is of questionable need at this time.

I'll leave you with some thoughts from councillors on the issue, from Cabin Radio's reporting:

Some councillors think the territory should use heavy-duty tents, as deployed in industries like mining and exploration, to set up warm, safe spaces some distance from downtown businesses.

While (Councillor Shauna) Morgan questioned if such tents could accommodate services like washrooms, phones, internet access, and a place to prepare hot meals, Councillor Niels Konge stated all of those could “be arranged with a little bit of money.”

Most councillors felt that no matter what solution is eventually devised, the Mine Rescue Building should not be part of it.

“I want to be very clear that I do not support a day shelter in that location in our city,” Konge said.

Councillor Robin Williams called on the GNWT to develop a purpose-built facility, stating: “I don’t want to see day shelter services scattered around the city. More temporary stopgaps is not something I’m interested in.”

“We keep getting the poopy end of the stick here,” said Councillor Stacie Smith. “I want the GNWT to go out and find better solutions, go digging for that money that the NWT needs for these services.”

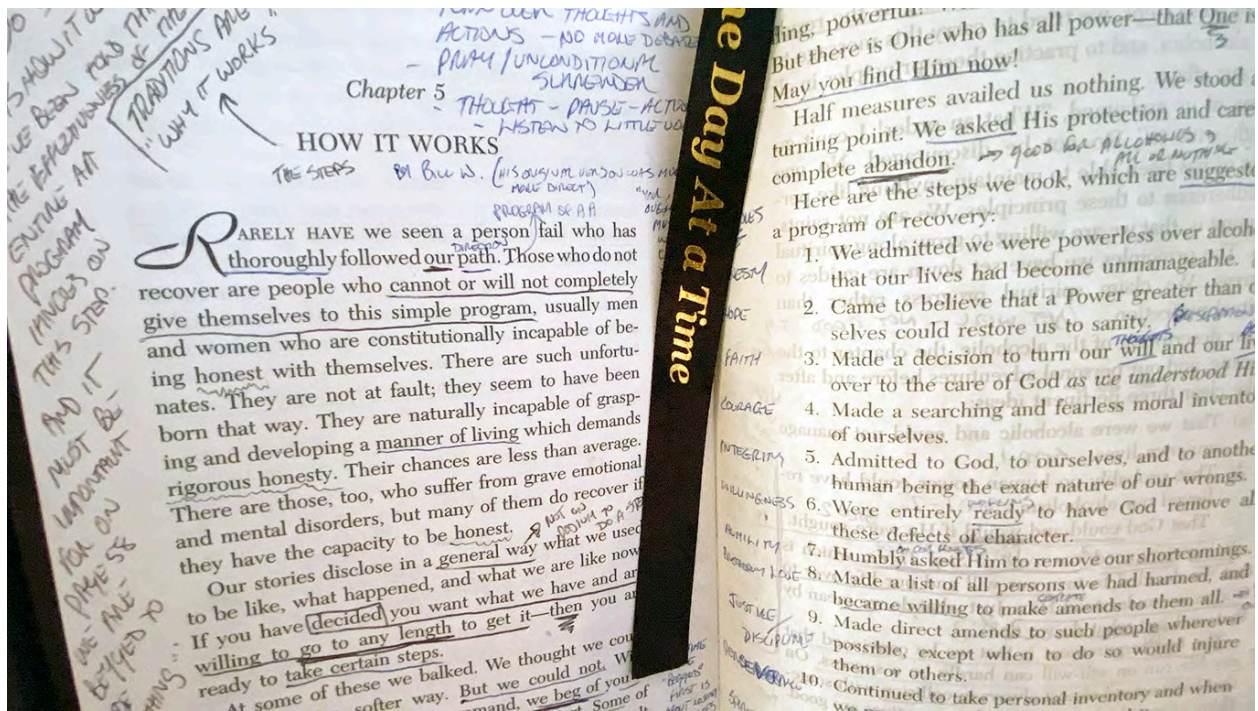
Posted on

November 16, 2020

Tags

GNWT, Government, homeless, Homelessness Edit

Faith without works is dead



Inside my Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book. I needed help for my addictions in the 1990s while living in Winnipeg. It was a tough decision for me to make, but it saved my life and provided me with a way of living I still enjoy to this day. I was clean and sober for four years before drifting away from the program when I left Winnipeg. I had discovered what drove me to drink and worked on those issues. I rarely drink any longer, but I am lucky enough to be able to do so when I want, without issue. I always keep in mind I am prone to excess. I am sharing this part of my life with you today, as I think it's relevant to the issue I'm writing about below. And perhaps it will encourage someone to seek help.

“Where is our new addiction treatment centre?” — *Monfwi MLA Jackson Lafferty*

“What’s truly surprising and shocking is that this issue did not come out during our mandate priority setting exercise, not a word about an addictions or healing centre at that time.” — *Health and Social Services Minister Julie Green*

Having an addiction is a curse. But the territorial government is in denial. The GNWT refuses to

admit it has a problem. It clings to a questionable model for its recovery services like a booze hound on a bottle.

The GNWT believes a geographic cure is best for alcoholics and drug addicts in its care. As with Hollywood celebrities, the government ships the physically sick and psychologically wounded drunks and druggies away to fancy rehab centres for what promises to be a miracle cure of some set period of time, often 28 days. Maybe longer.

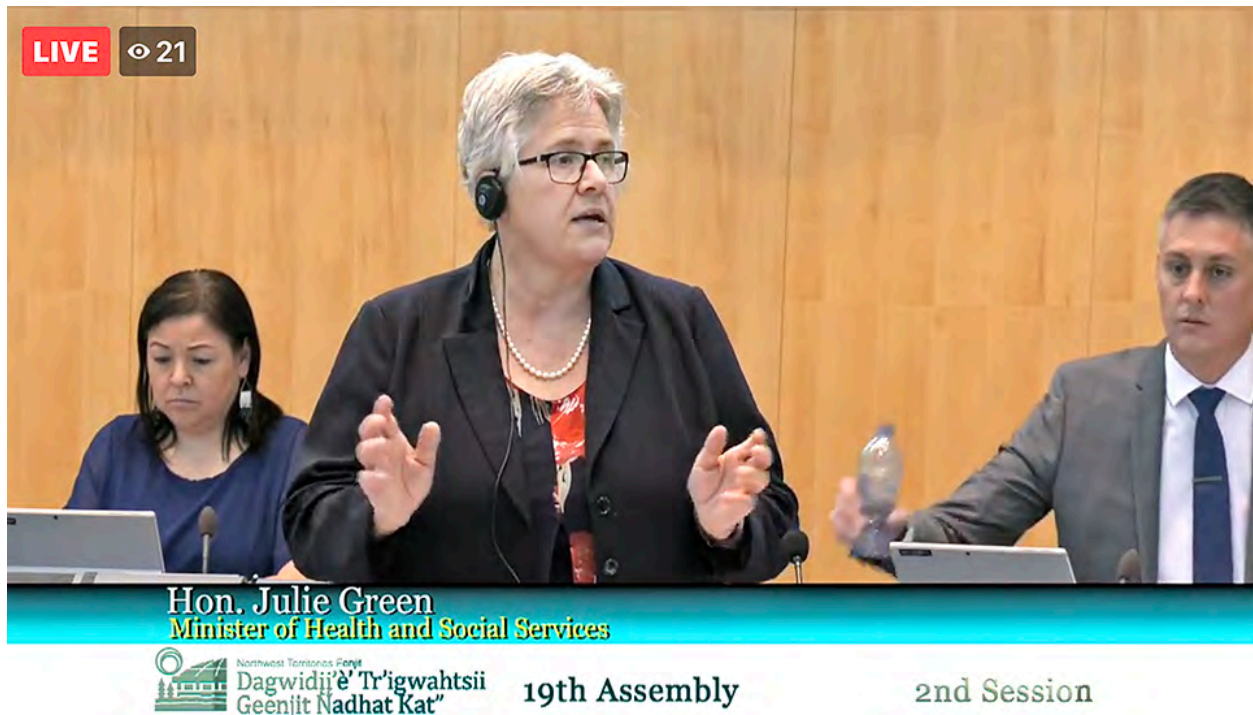
Go away, get the cure, come back and yer all set. Aftercare is, often, a threadbare afterthought.

Indigenous people often from small, remote communities — often used to used to traditional lifestyles — are bundled onto a plane to faraway centres, near Edmonton, in Calgary, in Nanaimo,

or in Toronto. Some offer Indigenous-based approaches, others are for, well, others.

Many are seeking recovery after doing a stint in jail. So imagine that scenario — flying from the North Slave Correctional Complex to a “serene and caring environment in beautifully resorted heritage homes,” at the “world-class” Renascent addiction centre in Toronto.

Sounds expensive, no? Amazingly, it’s not.



Health and Social Services Minister Julie Green spoke confidentially in the Assembly last week about the cost savings per bed night as opposed to earlier failed northern treatment centres. The GNWT closed the last one, Nats'ejee K'eh Treatment Centre on the on the Kátł'odeeche First Nation, in territorial government in 2013.

Nats'ejee K'eh had an annual \$2-million operating budget, costing \$522 per day per client.

“In contrast, the department’s current contracts for treatment range from \$180 per day to \$452 per day,” Green told the Assembly.

Green said in Nats'ejee K'eh's final full year of operations, 133 people attended treatment. In contrast, over the past six years, since the GNWT started using southern facilities, an average of 228 people attend treatment each year.

The current fiscal year budget for out-of-territory addictions treatment is \$2.1 million, said Green, with an anticipated spend this year of \$2.3 million.

Said Minister Green in the NWT Legislative Assembly on Tuesday:

“Nats’ejee K’eh worked at a 38-per-cent capacity in the last three years it was opened, and we’ve been able to double the number of people who get residential treatment for the same money over the last six years.

“What we understand is: the hitch at Nats’ejee K’eh and other northern treatment centres is confidentiality. I think we all know that everybody knows everybody, and they don’t necessarily want to restart their sober lives in the NWT.”

Now that’s true. A crucial aspect found in many recovery programs is to dig down deep and make “a searching and fearless moral inventory,” and then make an honest confession to yourself and another person. And in Alcoholics

Anonymous, also to make an honest confession to God or your Higher Power of one's choosing.

If you're in a rehab centre in, let's say, a regional centre in the NWT, chances are you'll have a friend or relative in the same place. That could make it quite awkward to speak freely.

But that wouldn't apply to everyone, especially people who perhaps haven't grown up in the North, or have done so in Yellowknife.

So I can see the benefits of having the option of sending someone ready for a clean and sober new life away for the initial grounding in the basics of living sober. However, for many others, having the option of staying close to family and friends when they start what can be a terrifying process of living sober would serve them better.

It would also be of great benefit to have a facility in the NWT for quick and intensive aftercare if or when a slip occurs. A place to have a sobriety tune-up, if you will. It could also act as a mothership for partnerships outside of the facility, with programs in the communities and out on the land.

It could develop into a proud brand for health, sobriety and sanity — not a sad shameful place.

Why the political focus lately of addictions? It was the main topic in the Assembly's Oral Questions sessions over the last couple of weeks.

Well, things are getting worse under the GNWT-imposed sheltered COVID-19 lifestyles. The pandemic has also provided fresh free cash from the federal government — the NWT punched above its weight when it came to Canada

Emergency Response Benefit claims this year — and that has led to increased boozing, drugging and all around mayhem in some communities. Combine that with reduced employment opportunities and you have a recipe for human misery.

But before looking forward any further, let's learn from the past.

Don't Call It Treatment: Bringing Dene Healing Back In Hay River

A new proposal for reviving the Nats'ejee K'eh Treatment Centre wants to use Dene concepts, culture and ceremonies

Aug 25, 2016

In the early 1980s, it was still taboo to talk about alcohol and addictions in the North, says former counsellor David Poitras. And yet, people were dying.

In August 2016, writer Meagan Wohlberg wrote in The Edge about plans to revive the Nats'ejee K'eh Treatment Centre into a wellness centre, without being laser focussed on addiction recovery.

And that indeed happened in 2019, with the opening of the 16-bed Dene Wellness and Development Centre, offering healing workshops, along with training opportunities for those working through the impacts of colonization — whether it be from residential school, addictions, or other forms of trauma, including sexual abuse.

In Wohlberg's excellent story, she discovered that Northerners working in addictions counselling in the '70s and '80s would be sent by the GNWT to Alberta for training. But in the early 2000s, the GNWT decided to bring in southern mental health professionals to replace local Indigenous wellness workers, who they determined were not properly certified to offer counselling.

Thus began the downfall of the Nats'ejee K'eh, as attendance dropped along with success rates.

It was difficult to attract certified staff from the South, which historically is the reason the GNWT has used to explain why a northern centre wouldn't work.

Another issue for any potential treatment centre in the NWT is the range of programming that would need to be offered. The NWT's population is pretty much evenly split between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. And the overall demographic is also close to 50-50 male and female.

Under the current plan, the GNWT can send recovering alcoholics and addicts to the centre that would best suit their needs. But there are often waitlists of weeks or months. Which is a HUGE problem.

They then return and need aftercare. That's where the GNWT could set up a centre that

could better do — or more effectively augment — what is being provided now.

So how would the GNWT set up a treatment in the NWT with enough capacity and range of programming — not to mention certified staff that could work with all those groups — without it soon becoming economically unfeasible? Well, a start would be to train counsellors at the NWT's new polytechnic university that is in planning stages.

I must point out at this point the GNWT has quickly found tens of millions of dollars to put towards the COVID-19 pandemic, which as of this writing has killed not a single person. This is a major thorn in the side for some MLAs.

Alcohol and drugs continue to take many lives and make the entire population worse off with the side-effects of crime and general misery that

comes along with living with or near someone whose life is in tatters.

But I digress.

There is also the fact that many people don't need residential treatment. After they sober up — either through a medical detox or just by hitting their own rock bottom — they can enter recovery through a personal psychologist (expensive) or through a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous (free). Or some other form of more culturally appropriate setting, such as the well-regarded Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation's urban healing camp behind the Multiplex.

Back to the Dysfunctional Diorama known as the NWT Legislative Assembly.

In recent days, many ideas have been floated, placing the newly minted Health and Social Services Minister — the left-leaning MLA from Yellowknife Centre, Julie Green — on the defence. She has made statements in the Assembly trying to give MLAs and the public information on policies and resources.

However, she still faced a barrage of questions from Monfwi MLA Jackson Lafferty, Thebacha MLA Frieda Martselos, Hay River South MLA Rocky Simpson, Great Slave MLA Katrina Nokelby, Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh MLA Steve Norn and others.



19th Assembly

2nd Session A

frustrated Monfwi MLA Jackson Lafferty questions Health and Social Services Minister Julie Green. Screen grab from NWT Legislative Assembly livestream.

Green noted that when she was an MLA on the Standing Committee for Social Development in the previous Assembly, she was on a tour of some of the treatment centres in the South and the most pressing problem facing NWTers there was housing when they returned home.

Said Green:

“They wanted to not return to overcrowded housing, housing over which they had no control of their environment. They were living on a couch and that kind of thing. What they really wanted was a house of their own. Not necessarily even a house but an apartment of their own.

“That seems to be one of the key factors in making aftercare work, and there is, in fact, some language in the mandate about trying this approach to see if, in fact, it will assist people to return north, first of all, and to maintain their sobriety.”

Great Slave’s Nokleby exposed the fact the GNWT amazingly doesn’t collect and compile statistics on relapse following those trips to southern treatment programs.



“What the department does collect is that people have finished their program,” said Green. “They don’t go back to them to determine whether they have relapsed in their program.”

Green noted that a survey is planned early next year for people who visited the treatment centres to determine “what has worked for them and what hasn’t worked for them and try and build

some best practices out of those responses.”
Good grief. We haven’t been doing that already?
For years?

Green repeatedly pressed the fact the on-the-land healing fund. Her department has made \$1.8 million annually available for on-the-land healing programs. But Indigenous leadership has only tapped into part of that cash.

She said:

“It is a very flexible program. People can use it for on-the land, individuals, after-care, family based treatment. It is allocated to Indigenous organizations.

“It is easy to get, and it is very much a community-based program where people can decide on their priorities and how they want

them implemented, whether they want to hire staff and so on and so forth.

“This is on offer to all communities, all Indigenous governments in the NWT, and I encourage them to apply for it.”

I applaud the MLAs for bringing this issue to the fore, but why wasn't this issue included in discussions when the mandate of this Assembly was structured after the 2019 election?

One reason could be the structure of the mandate development process. The finished document, 2019-2023 Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, states it “reflects the 22 priorities set by all members of the Legislative Assembly based on what members heard from their constituents.”

How many homeless alcoholics did the candidates hear from during their campaigns? Did many drug addicts show up for town hall debates? Who funded the candidates' campaigns or provided advice and motivation? Who are the community power brokers behind each of the newly elected MLAs?



Men drink in the shade across the street from the Day Shelter/Sobering Centre in downtown Yellowknife. Public intoxication is a year-round problem in the city.

While the general issue of homelessness and poor public housing options was discussed at a couple of community election forums I attended in the summer of 2019 — and I did see some advocates for street people in the audiences — I doubt if many of their clients were on the list of electors.

But now, after some high-profile crimes and pressure on shelters and society due to COVID-19 regulations from the GNWT and cash initiatives available from the feds, the MLAs have decided to make addictions and recovery their cause du jour.

Addressing the root causes of addictions is something that will take years, after already taking years. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action has provided an albeit ambitious framework to redress the legacy of residential schools and

advance the process of restoring of relations between Indigenous people and the rest of Canada.

Call to Action No. 21 states:

We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

Nunavut has already taken advantage of new federal cash made available to address some of the Calls to Action and nabbed \$47.5 million for a recovery centre located in Iqaluit to provide residential treatment and outpatient services. In addition, staff will be locally sourced and trained to run the centre.

The Nunavut Recovery Centre, stated a news release from August 2019, will provide a range of treatment and healing interventions that will address both addictions and trauma, and will be founded on Inuit cultural practices and values. Clinical counselling services will also be incorporated. The Recovery Centre will be part of a system wide approach that includes on the land treatment and healing, as well as support for Inuit workforce development and capacity.

Stated Minister of Indigenous Services Seamus O'Regan in 2019:

“Today we move towards improving access to culturally safe and appropriate health services closer to home that are effective and sustainable. This partnership highlights how we can work together to improve the health of Inuit.”

When someone discovers they have an addiction — either innate or acquired — they will need to first admit they have a problem. This usually comes after some form of intervention, either from friends, family, employers or the justice system.

Then a person has to hit their own version of an emotional bottom. They have to admit to themselves they have a problem and want a shot at a clean and sober life.



An intoxicated person struggling on 50th Street one early morning to get to the nearby Day Shelter/Sobering Centre

It's a nightmarish proposition. It's impossible to imagine life without the comfort of booze and dope. But if a decision is made, help is

immediately needed. Some severe addicts will need medical detox. No waiting lists. No bureaucracy.

When I lived in Winnipeg in the '90s and had some years of sobriety under my belt, I visited detox wards in hospitals to work with those in recovery. They can be very sick. It isn't pleasant. Booze and drugs weaken your body. And the associated lifestyles are also usually not healthy in any way. But there is hope for them.

If someone is in jail, sobriety is imposed on them and some programming is available. Programming, by the way, is not one-size-fits all proposition. It can be clinically based, culturally focussed, or a 12-step concept, based on a belief in a Higher Power.

But when a person is released from jail or prison, they might be physically detoxed, but

still not emotionally prepared for a life of sobriety. Many just return to their communities and back to their old dangerous ways of living. Same with people returning from residential treatment in the South. They might feel great, if the program caught on, but many will need to start a lifetime of emotional work to stay sober.



Booze seized by RCMP during a bootlegging investigation. It's sold at a steep markup overnight when liquor stores are closed. Or smuggled into dry communities. Vultures will prey on the weak. Photo by RCMP.

That's why, when a person returns from a residential program, they need safe housing. Improved housing across the NWT needs to be a GNWT priority. It's in the current group's mandate, so get at it folks. There is federal cash available right now for fast construction of housing.

And when a person does get sober, they want and need something productive to do. For some, that could mean getting out on the land and forging a traditional life for themselves and their families. For others, they will need a paying job or a community project.

But for all recovering addicts, they need effective aftercare that works for whatever culture they might hail from. That's where a NWT treatment/healing centre could help a lot. Or maybe, as MLA Martselos suggested, one centre in the three major regions.

They could be one-stop shops, offering a residential option for those seeking recovery in the NWT, short-term transitional housing for those returning from centres in the South, a venue for outside 12-step meetings, guided help through the transition back to their home communities and resources for individuals to start recovery programs anywhere they are wanted in the NWT.

Covering courts for Cabin Radio has exposed me to the horrible ways that alcohol and drugs have permeated society for generations in the NWT. Almost everyone appearing before a judge has a sad story of addiction to tell. The cycle needs to have a stick stuck in its spokes.

Will it be the 19th Legislative Assembly that takes the issue by the horns and gets some good work done?

From the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous:

“The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the house in turmoil.

“Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.

“We feel that elimination of our drinking is but a beginning. A much more important demonstration of our principles lies before us in our respective homes occupations and affairs.”

Posted on

November 1, 2020

Tags

Addictions, CERB, GNWT, Recovery Edit

Cochrane's ultimatum to MLAs: Fund new agency or 'take me out'



Premier Caroline Cochrane was on the hot seat Friday in the Assembly.

The Dysfunctional Diorama known as the NWT Legislative Assembly re-grouped on Thursday, and by the end of Friday's question period, Premier Caroline Cochrane threw her arms up in frustration and dared the MLAs to oust her.

Perhaps Cochrane was upset the regular MLAs in our unofficial opposition didn't accept her many apologies for screw-ups associated with the fast-tracked creation of an \$87-million agency to handle all things COVID-19, as many other stated priorities of the group remain in limbo.

“If that is the reason that they will say, ‘Take her out,’ then take me out because health and safety is priority,” a clearly perturbed Cochrane said at the end of oral questions on Day 36 of the second session of the NWT's 19th Assembly.

“I have an obligation as the premier of the Northwest Territories to make sure that the health and safety of our residents comes first, and I will hold that to my end.”

Cochrane had been challenged by Monfwi MLA Jackson Lafferty over the need for, and the expense of, the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat, announced on Sept. 3. The new 150-person agency, designed to pull together COVID-19-related supports and resources from multiple departments, has been the target of intense public criticism.



19th Assembly

Monfwi MLA Jackson Lafferty in the Assembly on Friday.

Several MLAs raised concerns over the two days kicking off the 14-day fall schedule, but the most pointed questioning came from Lafferty, the last Assembly's speaker.

“I did not hear any support from the general public or Aboriginal governments to create an \$87-million bureaucracy — \$87 million that could be better well spent in housing, lack of teachers, special needs, all those issues at the community level, a real issue,” he said. “It boggles me that we are creating this ‘Taj Mahal’ bureaucracy. It’s unthinkable.”

Lafferty also asked Cochrane, to “please list other options that she considered before deciding on the costly expansion of our government to form another bureaucracy,” and suggested the new agency “promises no improvement at vastly increased expense” over the original response drawn from existing resources across several departments.

Cochrane said the goal was to relieve staff working overtime in some departments and also to answer concerns raised by residents,

municipal and Indigenous governments, and the business sector. GNWT information states that 163 full and part-time employees have been working on the ‘Rona response, most of them redeployed from other areas of government. The federal government will contribute \$23.4 million to the new agency, with the GNWT on the hook for the rest. It will be running for up to 2.5 years.

Cochrane first started talking about a specialized Covid-19 unit in July, but its announcement came without the usual consultation process and caught many MLAs by surprise when announced at a committee meeting last month.

“The COVID secretariat was not something that just came up and we said we are going to have a new agency because would have nothing better to do,” the premier told the Assembly. “It came out of trying to do the best we could. I know that

I heard that we did not talk about MLAs, we did not talk to the Indigenous governments.

“The secretariat is not something that came up because it was something to do. We have not even had time to think of things to do. We have just been go, go, go.”

Cochrane recalled for MLAs when she attended some meetings with a minister and municipal governments over the summer.



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Representing Northern Business Since 1973

September 08, 2020

Premier Caroline Cochrane
PO Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9
Delivered via email: Caroline_cochrane@gov.nt.ca

RE: COVID-19 Secretariat

Dear Premier Cochrane,

We are writing to you regarding the COVID-19 Secretariat that was recently announced on Friday, September 04, 2020. From the press release, we are to understand that the creation of this Secretariat will "foster greater clarity, accountability, and consistency in the territory's pandemic response. The Secretariat will be responsible for border compliance, enforcement, Protect NWT, 811, isolation centers, and personal protective equipment." Our understanding of the announcement indicates that this Secretariat will be staffed by permanent employees "The Secretariat will be staffed by 150 full-time, part-time, and relief positions. The government is working on a breakdown of how many of those 150 positions will be new hires."

This announcement has raised several concerns from the business community. Thus far, the total cost of a new GNWT division is budgeted at \$86m; \$23.4m from the Federal Government funding that was earmarked to better prepare our healthcare system. The primary justification for our extensively restrictive regulations, rules, and policies regarding COVID-19 was not to overburden an already taxed health system. Thus, we feel the \$23.4m would be better allocated to better preparing the healthcare system, not creating another unnecessary level of bureaucracy.

The business community is very concerned about creating a division in the Health and Social Services department six months into a pandemic and five months since our last case. We just went through budget deliberations where the business community was essentially told that it is up to us to generate more revenue. It was indicated that the GNWT could not cut costs anywhere thus the business community would have to carry the burden through increased small business tax (we currently have the highest small business tax in Canada already) and the possible introduction of a sales tax. By creating 150 new permanent positions, the GNWT puts an even further burden on the business community to financially support these new jobs. When currently 20-25% of the current GNWT staff are not back in the office, there is no reason why those individuals could not be redirected and those that need to be brought in should be done so on contract.

The first page of a letter from the NWT Chamber of Commerce dated Sept. 8

expressing concerns over the expansion of the GNWT's bureaucracy with the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat. It was part of a campaign by members to put pressure on MLAs.

“Every meeting we went to ... they said, ‘Provide more. We are scared. Please help us. We want firmer, more border controls. We want more isolation. We do not want them in our communities. We need to have PPE. We are scared. Tell us what to do. Give us a connection.’”

“At the same time ... businesses were saying, ‘Open up the GNWT.’ We had pressure that was saying, ‘Use your resources. Keep the borders controlled. Keep the isolation,’ but, ‘Get back to business.’”

“We can't do both, so we make a choice.”

That choice will come this session, as the budget for the secretariat will have to be approved by

MLAs — a cart-before-the-horse gambit by the premier.

On Friday, Hay River South MLA Rocky Simpson slammed money going to the virus-fighting agency as other crucial programs remain wanting. That includes battling addictions, which is a serious health and safety threat across the NWT.



Hay River South MLA Rocky Simpson questioning Premier Caroline Cochrane.

“This government is providing some financial resources to address addictions, but knowing that this government has no issue identifying \$87 million to address COVID monitoring and enforcement when no one has died in the NWT but is slow to act when it comes to dealing with a disease that is hospitalizing, killing, or destroying our family members and friends on a regular basis, I find this to be a travesty,” he said.

“This disease (drug addiction) does not work in a vacuum. To fuel itself, it takes advantage of peer pressure, lack of housing, unemployment, mental health issues, personal trauma, effects of residential schools, and other realities. Because of this, I expect and look to this government to take a cross-departmental approach to address it.

“We must look for and action real solutions that work for the people of the NWT.”

The day earlier, Simpson told the assembly the NWT leads a leader.

“The people of the NWT want a champion. They want a leader, and they want to hear from that leader. In this instance: the premier,” he said.

“They want her to show leadership and create enthusiasm by providing relevant information in a timely manner, not only on COVID matters but, just as importantly, the economy. I ask the premier: how will she accomplish this, that is, becoming a champion for the NWT?”

In answering his question, Cochrane offered one of her many apologies of the re-grouped Second Session.

“Again, like I said, rushing, all of departments rushing, all of us rushing to try to figure out what

we needed to do to keep our people safe, I dropped the ball on communications,” the premier said. “Again, I did not realize how important it was. The secretariat, the issue with the secretariat brought it to the forefront.

“It told us that we need to do better, and so, like I said, our communications team is doing the best they can with the resources they have.

“You will see more in the coming weeks on how we are going to actually implement our communications strategy going forward.”

It was the first time the new-look Assembly was in place, with ousted minister Katrina Nokleby in her seat with regular MLAs as the Great Slave constituency rep and new cabinet member Julie Green with the health, seniors and social services portfolios. A cabinet shuffle early last

month also saw new faces answering many of the same old questions.

The last sitting of this session ended in June. A short emergency sitting in late August to deal with Nokleby saw increasing acrimony between several factions of the house.

It will be interesting to see if the premier's challenge to the MLAs to 'Take her out' — politically, of course — is accepted.

Grumblings over her performance have been growing under the surface, as the post-election promise of a vibrant new group of politicians shrugging off the do-nothing closed-door Assemblies of the past hasn't materialized.



UPDATE: Thanks to everyone who read this Sunday post. You have made it one of my most popular to date. I also received some interesting feedback from folks, both inside and outside of government. You can always contact me, preferably by email to mail@unlimitedjames.media or texting me at 867-445-1842. The day after my post appeared, Cabin Radio did its own story on the events of Friday in the Assembly, which provided some

*updated numbers for the costs associated with
the new COVID department/agency/secretariat.*

Posted on

October 18, 2020

Tags

Cochrane, GNWT, Lafferty, NWTpoli, Simpson Edit

BLOG NOTES/

QUOTES #23:

YKDFN sinks dreams

of water ‘squatters’; Liberals grow money tree; and waiting to exhale on vape ban



Some of the houseboats bobbing on Yellowknife Bay, with Jolliffe Island at top left.

“These acts of unauthorized occupancy are disrespectful to YKDFN, a sovereign nation, who have occupied and used the area since time immemorial: before even the existence of the City of Yellowknife.” — *from YKDFN statement.*

“We intend to take whatever legal as well as other action we can to ensure these houseboaters un-moor their boats and move out of the area.” — *YKDFN chief executive Jason Snaggs told Cabin Radio.*

“There’s about five to six houseboaters out there that more or less are squatting ... without chief or council permission.” — *Ndilq Chief Ernest Betsina told CBC North.*

The Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) drew a line in the sand — well, the water, really — when it issued a sternly worded notice earlier

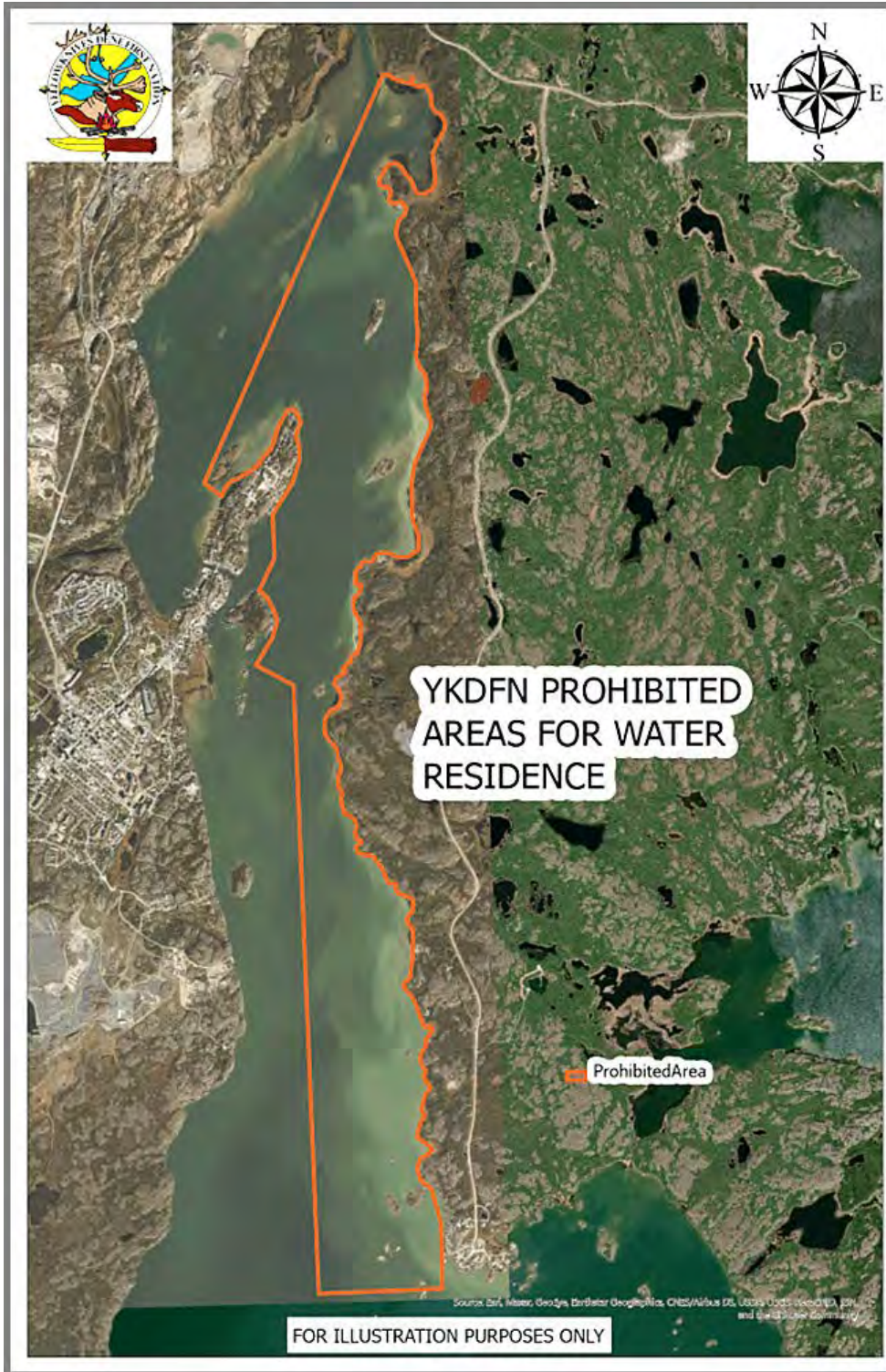
this month to a handful of houseboaters who have floated into its area.

Then, last week, eviction notices were stapled to the vessels.

Jason Snaggs, YKDFN chief executive of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, told Cabin Radio: “We have noticed, within the last two years, a few people finding their way along the Dettah Road shore. We have one houseboater that parks on the Dettah Road almost permanently to get access to his houseboat, next to one of our islands.

“Now we have two or three on our side of the lake and two abandoned barges as well. The people have said this is a major disrespect to the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and their land and water.

“There are a few people who are not aware of the historical significance of this side of the lake. We hope they recognize that they need to un-moor their houseboats.”



Cabin reported that traditionally, houseboats on Yellowknife Bay have moored outside the area shown on the First Nation's map (pictured above), including the western shore of Jolliffe Island.

The YKDFN stated it could take legal action to remedy the unauthorized land and water occupancy within the Yellowknives Dene Traditional Chief Drygeese Asserted Community Area.

But it's not clear to me who has jurisdiction over the bay. The federal government manages water in the NWT. But a 2016 Territorial Court decision ruled that NWT laws do apply on the bay. However, houseboat owners have previously fought off attempts by the city to regulate them, claiming the feds have jurisdiction. And what, if anything, would the Mackenzie River Basin Board have to say? Hmmm.

Over the past year, I've noticed some structures being built on the opposite side of the bay — the YKDFN side — with some choice waterfront lots apparently being snapped up. I wonder who

approved those developments and if they are indeed being regulated? I wonder how the development on that side of the bay will look if it is allowed to continue to expand? Sure, this side of the bay is fully developed, but that other side's pristine vista sure looked nice. I'm not against houses going up — and I have no say in what the YKDFN does with its lands, of course — but I just hope it will be well-considered and carefully planned.

The YKDFN's push to oust a few interlopers could open up a can of worms, as the city and the YKDFN are working on a land swap that would see Ndilo, Jolliffe Island the eastern shoreline approaching Dettah removed from the city's map boundaries. The change would expand the city's southwestern boundary, while better connecting the two YKDFN communities of Ndilo and Dettah.

While that sounds all great and good, some members of the Yellowknife Bay's iconic houseboat community — celebrated internationally as part of the city's quirky identity — wonder what it means for them.

In a CBC North report one year ago, some houseboat owners (captains?) expressed concerns over the uncertainty about what the City of Yellowknife/YKDFN land swap would mean for both themselves, and some of the folks who have erected some form of structure on the various islands in the bay.

“There is animosity, there is phobia, there's fear,” Matthew Grogono, a long-time houseboater, told CBC. “Is it going to be for the better or for the worse? I would rather work with Ernest Betsina ... than the former mayors and city of Yellowknife.

In that CBC story, Coun. Julian Morse said the houseboat community is a popular tourist attraction and part of Yellowknife's culture, but has been "tenuous" situation since the first houseboat was floated.

"There is a side of the history of this town that's been colonial that has involved essentially westerners coming into this community and doing whatever they wanted without asking any permission whatsoever," he said in the CBC story.

Since the city reportedly has no leases with folks living on Jolliffe Island, the largest land mass in the bay, they haven't been part of land-swap negotiations. That island, Mayor Rebecca Alty has stated, falls under the Akaitcho process.

The houseboaters pay someone to dock their boats, but they live property tax free and use the

city's services when not bobbing about in their self-contained homes. I like the idea of being an individual. I like the concept of fighting government and the tax dollars that often go to policies and projects I don't agree with.

The visuals the houseboats provide generate an immeasurable amount of free tourism marketing. But land is land and a system of rules to avoid conflicts over property ownership — private and public — must be fairly developed and evenly applied. That has been the case since ancient times.

The objective of Akaitcho Process negotiations is to clarify rights and to provide clarity and certainty with respect to ADFN's land, resources and self-government rights in the Northwest Territories stemming from the "agreement of peace and friendship" known as Treaty 8 in 1900.

My hope is that people wanting to live a free life on the water will be able to do so into the future. However, it will have to be done respecting the incoming changes to the city's boundary and the "property" line being drawn up with the YKDFN.

I also hope the YKDFN will regulate development on its lands so as to respect the environment and the beauty of the region.

It would also help if the jurisdictional issues about the bay become clear during the Akaitcho Process, which is to head into public hearings at some point, prior to ratification, which is scheduled to start next year.

***UPDATE:** The CBC reported on Nov. 17 that, "the Yellowknives Dene First Nation says it has reached an agreement with several houseboaters*

who anchored on the nation's side of Yellowknife Bay without its permission.”

GRITS DIG FINANCIAL HOLE, PLANT MONEY TREE

Canada pledges \$400M in global humanitarian aid to help combat coronavirus. — *The Canadian Press, Sept. 29, 2020*

Canada's deficit to hit \$330B as coronavirus lands 'permanent' economic impact. — *The Canadian Press, Sept. 29, 2020*

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau continues to forge his globalist ways even as our country is in dire need of some help for its own people.

Now the Liberals' enchantment with being the world's gift fairy might be sound policy in normal times — sound policy for members of that party, I note, not for everyone in Canada — but as we continue to dig a very unstable fiscal pit, it's time for the Grits to help Canadians first.

Since the outbreak of the global pandemic, have things improved for Indigenous people across the country? Better water? Better housing? Nope. In fact, the situation has grown more dire, as COVID-19 has either easily entered ill-prepared remote Indigenous communities in the South, or have forced those in the North to essentially shelter in place since last spring.

The group Canada Without Poverty states that five million people in Canada — one out of every seven individuals. The group notes that vulnerable groups such as people living with disabilities, single parents, elderly individuals,

youth, and racialized communities are more susceptible to the impacts of poverty.

Our universal access health-care system, while being a model for many in the world, still rations out care and forces many people to wait months or years for needed procedures that could be done in days or weeks elsewhere.

As reported by The Canadian press, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) says the federal deficit for the year is on track to hit \$328.5 billion as a result of COVID-19 and the “permanent impact” it is having on the economy.

That figure, reports CP, released a couple of weeks ago, reflects measures announced as of the start of the month, including an estimated \$225.9 billion in emergency aid in response to the pandemic.

The PBO warns that Canada's current deficit level will be soon be unsustainable.

But that doesn't faze Trudeau. He seems to think money grows on trees. Big Liberal money forests.

Or at very least, is a student of the Modern Monetary Theory. That's a loony idea espoused by the radical left, which holds that governments can simply print money as needed. However, the long-term effects can be higher taxation or higher inflation. And we could end up like Greece in a decade or so.

NEWS

Evening Brief: A throne speech for the books

By iPolitics. Published on Sep 23, 2020 5:45pm



A screenshot of Gov. Gen. Julie Payette delivering the speech from the throne in the Senate in Ottawa on Wednesday.

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In the recent Throne Speech, our wacko Gov.-Gen. Julie Payette — looking fresh after making a brief foray from her hermit wing at Rideau Hall — read Trudeau's promise to move forward with the national child care and pharmacare social programs.

How the heck does he plan to pay for them, when he's shovelling our hard-earned tax dollars

out the back door to the rest of the world in a pitiful virtue signal?

I note that recent Ipsos polling for Global News showed 55 per cent of Canadians say the federal deficit is too large. Also, 54 per cent of Canadians would support an election this fall.

It doesn't appear an election is coming as the minority Liberal government has caved to NDP spending demands, but when it does, perhaps some sanity will reveal itself in the results.

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IGNITING A VAPE DEBATE

In this age of avoiding other humans, public engagement by government on major projects has gone online. I like it. It gives everyone the

chance to offer opinions and avoids special interest groups hogging the media spotlight by being the loudest voices in a public session in some meeting room.

In recent weeks, I've taken surveys on the future of Postsecondary Education in the NWT, the Yellowknife Aquatic Centre and the GNWT's pondering of a ban of the sale of flavoured vape products.

Since I'm a vaper, I'll write a bit about that topic today.

As reported by Cabin Radio, the NWT's Tobacco and Vapour Products Control Act came into force in March. It regulates the display and advertisement of vaping products, as well as being the legislation that formally prohibits their sale and supply to minors.

With the act now in place, the territory is developing regulations to enforce its provisions — and is asking residents for feedback.

I quit smoking in the fall of 2018 with the help of JUUL and I've been vaping ever since. It's a bit cheaper than using tobacco and a whole lot healthier for me and anyone around me. And the exhaust from my JUUL is odourless. Which makes it easy to sneak a wee puff in some non-smoking areas, such as airports, office buildings and even grocery stores.

But I digress.

As for a ban on flavoured vaping products I am for it — to a point. Sure, I use a 'flavour' with my JUUL system, that being Virginia Tobacco and Golden Tobacco. I can choose from three levels of nicotine and have been gradually moving to smaller percentages.

But the amount of vape flavours out there is endless. And many are candy flavours that appeal to younger people — with or without nicotine. Nicotine levels in e-juice vary dramatically, from nicotine-free to forms comprised of potent nicotine salts that may contain more poison per puff than you'd expect from a cigarette.

The disposable styles of devices are especially of concern, as they have intense flavours and the devices can be easily concealed.

Is vaping better for society as a whole than tobacco smoking? Of course. Is vaping less healthy than inhaling nothing at all except the air around us? Yes. Would not inhaling any foreign substance into one's lungs be the best idea? Yup, but humans are mostly a finicky, addictive lot.

Should kids vape? Nope. Can we always prevent kids from doing something that's bad for them? Of course not, but we can make it hard for them.

Flavoured vaping products should be restricted for adult use. Especially those with nicotine in them. As they are now. A GNWT ban would only make the products more sought out on the Internet. I would think having a teen sucking on a vape pen is a better idea than using cigarettes, no? And what would the GNWT consider to be a vape flavour? Tobacco is a flavour.

And just a note, the scare a few months ago over an number of vaping-related illnesses in North America faded once it was discovered most of those cases involved people unwisely introducing cannabis into their vape juice, or sourcing it from a sketchy maker.

Just continue to regulate the heck out of them and prevent any advertising of the candy flavoured types. I have no use for the candy flavoured juice. I'm not vaping for the fun of it. I'm doing it to avoid the proven lethal consequences of smoking cigarettes.

Posted on

October 13, 2020

Tags

Development, Liberals, Trudeau, Vaping, YKDFN Ed

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NOTES/QUOTES

#22: Green on the

**‘Rona; a sturdier
cabinet; one defiant
killer; and media
mumblings**



Premier and ministers explain NWT cabinet reshuffle

Published: September 8, 2020 at 2:17pm - SARAH PRUYS



Newly appointed minister Julie Green takes questions about her new portfolios on September 8, 2020. Sarah Sibley/Cabin Radio

“The plan is what it is, Ollie. I can’t change it. I recognize the need to defend it

politically.” — *Health Minister Julie Green talking to Cabin Radio’s Ollie Williams on the Emerging Wisely Plan.*

In her first major interview since landing the fraught Health minister position in cabinet, Julie Green failed her Covid-19 test.

Failed, as she upheld the GNWT’s position of simply ceding all aspects of pandemic management to Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) Dr. Kami Kandola.

“I guess, like everyone else, I’m waiting on Phase 3 to come along. It’s going to give us much more freedom than we have now,” Green told Cabin Radio’s Ollie Williams last week.

Minister Julie, you are now in a position to lead, not just to follow. Are you going to simply rubber stamp every policy suggestion that is placed in front of you by your staff? Agree to all schemes dreamed up by your policy advisors?

Of course, as a public health professional, Kandola will put forth her ideal plan to provide chance-free protection of the territory from the nasty coronavirus. And she's proven to be very capable of doing just that. But to the detriment of our daily life experiences.

But as with any other public servant, she will ask for more than she actually expects to receive.

And Kandola is going to be the star at future medical conferences. She'll be held up as an example of what can happen when weak politicians at the highest levels just listen to the public servants — even if they are the CPHO.

Said Green in the interview: “I recognize that I may be able to provide some — not advice to the chief public health officer, because this is really a medical position and I’m not a medical person — but I can certainly relay the concerns of my constituents and the residents of the NWT in wanting to advance.”

Green has imagined the whole process of government in reverse. Now, at the beginning of this pandemic, I can understand how everyone freaked out and just wanted to get a handle on things. And Kandola’s plan has worked perfectly. The five cases we had at the time of this writing — with no community spread — have all recovered. And that was months ago.

But with our border closed and with mandatory self-isolation for all but essential workers, why are we stuck at the overly restrictive Phase 2 of the Emerging Wisely pandemic recovery plan?

It's just a situation without merit — and without a foreseeable ending — given the reality on the ground in the territory. The Emerging Wisely document was drawn up months ago and enacted in June. Hasn't anything changed since then? Has nothing been learned about how to live with the threat of the 'Rona?

People get it. We are socially distancing and wearing masks as needed. But businesses and civic facilities need to be allowed to open up more. Winter is coming and our life in the North involves being inside. Unless you enjoy being out on the land.

But I'm not a moose hunter and want to be able to enjoy life inside the NWT's Covid-free bubble. Now if that bubble was to burst, we can roll things back a bit if we can't test and contact trace the small outbreak of cases that we might very well get. But it's just unfair and

unreasonable to make us languish in Phase 2 until a vaccine is available up here. Which could be months and months and months from now.

“We are told by the media all the time that a second wave is coming, and that we need to be prepared for it,” Green said the interview. “And we’ve been briefed as regular MLAs – and I know the media has, too — about the pandemic plan and about the precautions that will be in place to take in large numbers of cases.”

How, exactly, would we all of a sudden get large numbers of cases? I can see maybe one or two cropping up in the evolving group of people who have travelled and are waiting the 14 days. But how would that translate into large numbers of cases without being detected and dealt with?

This is irrational fear. This is taking things to the extreme. This is a public health professional

getting everything in her dream plan rubber stamped by spineless elected officials.

If we never take any chances in life, why aren't all speed limits lowered to 30 km/h across the territory? Why do we actually allow people to go out on the land where they can get lost or injured? Heck, why do we get out of bed each day?

Said Green in the interview: "Did the return of teachers and students produce more cases?"

How could that possibly happen? We have no cases right now. Consider this simple equation: Add (virus-free) children + (virus-free) teachers + (virus-free) staff and what do you get? Virus-free schools.

Minister Julie, go ahead and get the Protect NWT and the 811 line staffed properly. Go ahead and make sure the enforcement at the border and of self-isolation plans is nimble and effective.

But please, for all that is precious, show some leadership and direct a relaxation of the rules inside our ‘Rona-free bubble to let us live in a bit less disruption. More people in bars and restaurants. Let our kids be kids in schools, pools and rinks.

We need to be able to gather indoors and as the days get darker and colder and be able to savour life in the North as we know it.

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BUILDING A CABINET

I note that Green received the most appropriate portfolios for her abilities in the recent cabinet shuffle, necessitated by the recent ouster from cabinet of the rebellious and outspoken Katrina Nokleby.

I suggested in a previous blog Green should receive the Social Services, Persons with Disabilities, Homelessness and Seniors departments. Which she did, for the most part, along with the whopper file of Health.

She just didn't get Homelessness, which would have been appropriate, as she represents the constituency of Yellowknife Centre. That responsibility remains with Paulie Chinna, of the Sahtu constituency in the middle of the territory — a person who has already admitted she isn't keenly aware of aspects of the problem which is a major issue in the capital.

But I digress.

I didn't think Premier Caroline Cochrane would take health from Diane Thom, despite the Inuvik Boot Lake rep underperforming on the file.



Overall, the shuffle does look decent. Caroline Wawzonek gets to focus on the Finance

Department, with R.J. Simpson taking the Justice Department off of her hands.

However, the bright and accomplished Wawzonek does get the important task of directing the Covid-restriction saddled Industry, Tourism and Investment sector.

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DEFIANT POST ON KILLER'S PAGE

A convicted killer apparently engaged in some jailhouse bravado — before he was sentenced.

“Locked upp but not forgotten, I’ll be out less den 2 years. #FreeAlecus,” stated a grammatically challenged post on a Facebook page apparently belonging to Alecus Quitte, of Gamètì.



Quitte, 23, was originally charged with murder in the stabbing death of 59-year-old Wedzin, which took place during an early morning argument April 2019 in Behchokò, fuelled by alcohol and drugs. And maybe some jealousy.

Quitte later made an agreement with the Crown to plead guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter.

On Sept. 8, he was sentenced in Supreme Court to six and a half years in prison. As I reported, Quitte was five days short of two years of

remand custody credit, so will have that deducted from his sentence.

By law, most offenders must be released by the Correctional Service of Canada, with supervision, after serving two-thirds of their sentence. That means Quitte will likely serve three years behind bars.

Perhaps that post indicates some extra optimism with the pending plea deal with the Crown? Or maybe his math was just off.

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MORE MEDIA MALFEASANCE

One of the many crosses that I bear is an inability to let bad journalism slide by.



Even while out at a lodge over the summer, I would keep up on the news. That is before I would use the this particular news source as a starter for a campfire.

Even if many outlets in the North employ rookies fresh out of journalism school, the editors are, for the most part, an experienced lot. In any event, the people of the NWT deserve responsible, accurate and intelligent reporting from companies purporting to be media.

So, I will call them out when the need arises. Here are a few matters that raised my eyebrows over the summer and in more recent times.

1) Driven by poverty and substance abuse, domestic violence in the NWT is a dire problem. We have some of the highest rates of the tragic crime in the country.

I was, however, a bit confused when it was announced in early August that the federal government was giving four women's shelters in the territory more than \$300,000 as a result of COVID-19.

The Tuktoyaktuk shelter and YWCA each netted \$97,000. Hay River and Inuvik facilities each received \$63,675.

It was part of a national money drop by the feds, including some 1,000 similar organizations.

As reported by CBC North, NWT MP Michael McLeod stated in an Aug. 5 news release the organizations have been “deeply affected” by the pandemic.

“The COVID–19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for survivors of sexual and domestic violence and the organizations that serve them,” the Liberal MP stated.

“That is why our government acted to support women and children fleeing gender-based violence, including front-line organizations here in the North.”

No problem with that. It’s terrific news for the organizations. What I did find a bit confusing was the comment made by Lyda Fuller, executive director of the YWCA.

“(It’s) enabled us to purchase additional cleaning supplies and protective equipment, and to make other changes to ensure physical distancing for clients and staff who live or work in our safe shelters,” she said in the statement.

Confusing because three months earlier, Fuller told CBC North the number of women seeking her agency’s help dropped to a standstill amid the COVID-19 pandemic

“Here in Yellowknife, we had no clients at all for the month of April,” Fuller is quoted as saying. “And it’s still empty ... And that’s very, very unusual. I can’t remember a month when we had no clients before.”

In the May 7 story, Fuller said was concerned abused women might not know the shelter was open, or worried over the potential for contracting the disease in the facility.

At the time, the NWT was in Phase One of the Emerging Wisely plan, or essentially complete shutdown. Relaxing Phase 1 came into effect on May 15. Relaxing Phase 2 came into effect on June 12.

Now I'm sure the \$97,000 in federal cash will be well-used by the YWCA and perhaps they have seen clients showing up in the weeks after the May 7 story. But how many? And what was the cause of the pause in clientele seen earlier this year?

I do wonder why the CBC didn't do any research on it's own website and ask Fuller about that before simply re-writing the McLeod news release and hitting the publish button.

2) Disgusting spray paint vandalism over the summer at the Centre Square Mall parkade

featured symbols of the neo-Marxist protest movement, Black Lives Matter.

A number of cars parked there were defaced with red spray paint — including a classic 1971 Volkswagen Beetle. Among the nonsensical scribbles were the letters “BLM” sprayed on a column, two walls, and the floor of the parkade.

For CBC North to describe the incident “alleged” vandalism is just silly. I mean, you can see it with your own eyes. I doubt the car’s owner did it to her own prized possession. The media up here in general use the term ‘allegedly’ far too often when reporting on crime. It’s just poor form.

Ambe Chenemu, an organizer affiliated with the BLM movement and its June rally in

Yellowknife, said the BLM lettering didn't represent the movement.

“I want to state here clearly that BLM is against any such acts of vandalism,” he told *Yellowknifer*. “I would like to emphasize that these types of sentiments and actions are what the black coalition has to deal with constantly to distract from the main conversation about anti-Black racism.”

3) This is just funny. But good on *The Edge* for candidly admitting its one-letter mistake.

GNWT to begin testing wastewater for coronavirus

The GNWT is planning to look for cases of COVID-19 that may be otherwise undetected in communities by testing wastewater for the coronavirus. Samples will be collected in Hay River, Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Inuvik and Fort Simpson. Wastewater sampling has been found to detect spread in communities up to 10 days before cases begin turning up in clinics.

(Ed. The earlier briefing had a typo in this headline that gave quite the visual.)

Source: **CBC North**

POSTSCRIPT

I'm wrapping up this blog with an image that should send shudders through anyone who thinks the year is moving too fast. Or those of us who just dislike Christmas for a variety of reasons. Even before we enjoy Thanksgiving or Halloween, the fine folks at the local Canadian Tire are preparing to deck their shelves with all things Yule. A feast of excitement and anticipation for some; visual festive nightmare for others.

Posted on

September 14, 2020

Tags

COVID-19, GNWT, media Edit

Time for the GNWT to step on the gas (and oil)

*The GNWT map shows oil and gas reserves in the Beaufort
Delta.*

“In a cruel twist ... communities such as Inuvik and Norman Wells, NWT, surrounded by vast hydrocarbon deposits, are forced to import large and costly quantities of fuel from southern Canada to keep homes warm and businesses running.” — *Financial Post*, 2013

“We’re trucking LNG all the way from Delta to burn it in Inuvik.” — *former premier Bob McLeod in 2018.*

“Cryopeak LNG Solutions Corp, based in Richmond BC, has completed the largest ever delivery of LNG by truck in the Northwest Territories, with the shipment being delivered to a power generation facility in Inuvik.” — LNG Industry, 2020

“Oil and gas future up here is very, very bleak.” — *Tuktoyaktuk Mayor Merven Gruben to CBC in 2019.*

You know, there’s plenty of blame to go around for the sorrowful failure of government — the many levels found in the NWT — for all of us to be benefiting from the vast gaseous bounty found beneath the soil and seas of the North.

But when I came across a recent story trumpeting a milestone liquefied natural gas (LNG) delivery by a massive Super B-Train semi-trailer truck from Delta, BC to the Mackenzie Delta, I just had to hang my head in shame as a resident of the NWT.

Cryopeak LNG completes largest truck LNG delivery to NWT

INFRASTRUCTURE

July 8, 2020, by Adnan Bajic

Richmond, BC-based Cryopeak LNG Solutions has completed a milestone delivery of LNG in the Northwest Territories.



Courtesy of Cryopeak LNG

The company said in its statement it has completed the largest ever delivery of liquefied natural gas by truck in

We need energy. And we could certainly use the cash and jobs that would come if we just cracked open onshore and offshore oil and gas development in the northern ranges of our huge territory.

The GNWT states the territory “has vast undeveloped oil and gas reserves.” The GNWT estimates we could hold as much as 37 per cent of Canada’s marketable light crude oil resources and 35 percent of its marketable natural gas resources.

It’s all right down there (points to ground), but that’s where it’s going to stay.

Decades of market fluctuations, environmental protests and regulatory red tape were, of course, topped off in 2016 by the Liberal government’s federal moratorium on new offshore licences. That was the final nail in the coffin.

So, now we have 82,000 litres of LNG trucked 3,729 kilometres from a port in BC along roads packed with tourists trying to enjoy the scenery — including the Dempster Highway. Not the Super B-Train truck, no matter how spectacular and capable of a vehicle it might be.

For a good perspective on the problem, read [this](#) from the *Financial Post* in 2018, quoting former premier Bob McLeod:

In the eyes of the Northwest Territories government and the energy industry, it's painfully ironic that the Beaufort Sea contains an estimated 56 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and eight billion barrels of oil while remote communities such as Inuvik, Iqaluit and many more rely on LNG or diesel shipped in from southern Canada for power.

“We’re trucking LNG all the way from Delta to burn it in Inuvik,” Northwest Territories premier Bob McLeod said, calling the situation a missed opportunity.

Inuvialuit Regional Corp. chair Duane Smith has in recent months called for development in the Beaufort Sea so that Inuvik and nearby Tuktoyaktuk could generate their own gas-fired power, rather than importing it all the way from southern BC

The IRC has done a feasibility study on drilling wells in the region and Smith has said a few wells show potential.

Overall, onshore and offshore oil and gas development in Canada’s North has come to a complete standstill in recent years thanks in part to the fall in oil prices and abundant supplies in less expensive regions like Alberta and BC A

federal moratorium on new offshore licences in the Arctic in 2016 has ensured that drilling activity in the region has all but ceased.

Jessica Shadian, the president and CEO of Arctic 360 and a professor at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, said there is some resentment in the territories that part of Ottawa's response to climate change has attempted to put the North "in a snow globe" so that "a bunch of people in southern Canada can feel good about it."

In 2001, the entire NWT extracted 1,471 million cubic metres of natural gas (1,471,000 litres). That amount slowly and steadily fizzled to 72 million cubic metres in 2019 (72,000 litres). If my math is sound, we produced less last year than fit in that mega-truck from BC.

Annual Volume of Mineral Production by Commodity						
Northwest Territories, 1999 to 2019						
	Gold	Silver	Diamonds	Natural Gas	Oil	Tungsten
	(Kg)	(tonnes)	(thousands carats)	(millions m ³)	(thousands m ³)	(tonnes)
1999	3,157	1	2,429	151	1,549	-
2000	3,839	1	2,435	770	1,434	-
2001	4,041	1	3,716	1,471	1,432	-
2002	3,555	1	4,937	1,197	1,375	2,295
2003	2,614	1	10,756	989	1,283	3,636
2004	511	-	12,680	739	1,235	-
2005	-	-	12,314	502	1,090	484
2006	-	-	12,976	280	1,083	2,500
2007	-	-	16,773	269	1,018	2,718
2008	-	-	13,691	203	941	2,795
2009	-	-	10,250	190	902	2,506
2010	-	-	11,005	176	873	364
2011	-	-	9,950	163	609	2,466
2012	-	-	9,769	163	756	2,554
2013	-	-	9,945	133	654	3,017
2014	-	-	11,343	120	642	2,708
2015	-	-	11,033	86	578	2,289
2016	-	-	12,348	83	522	-
2017	-	-	20,826	9	17	-
2018	-	-	20,541	15	98	-
2019	-	-	16,200	72	435	-

This chart from the GNWT shows the mineral production picture by numbers.

Thank you everyone. Especially Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Job well done. And why is it again that we keep electing a Liberal MP in the NWT?

Last year, before voters in the NWT returned Liberal MP Michael McLeod to Ottawa, the feds returned \$430 million in security deposits to oil and gas companies, including Imperial Oil Ltd, Exxon Mobil, Chevron Canada and BP Canada. Those companies had planned on spending billions exploring the offshore in Canada's Beaufort Sea, the CBC reported. But Trudeau et al decided to side with their green supporters and large-city limousine liberals and freeze all offshore exploration in the Canadian Arctic, adding insult to the injury of the 2016 moratorium on new offshore licences.

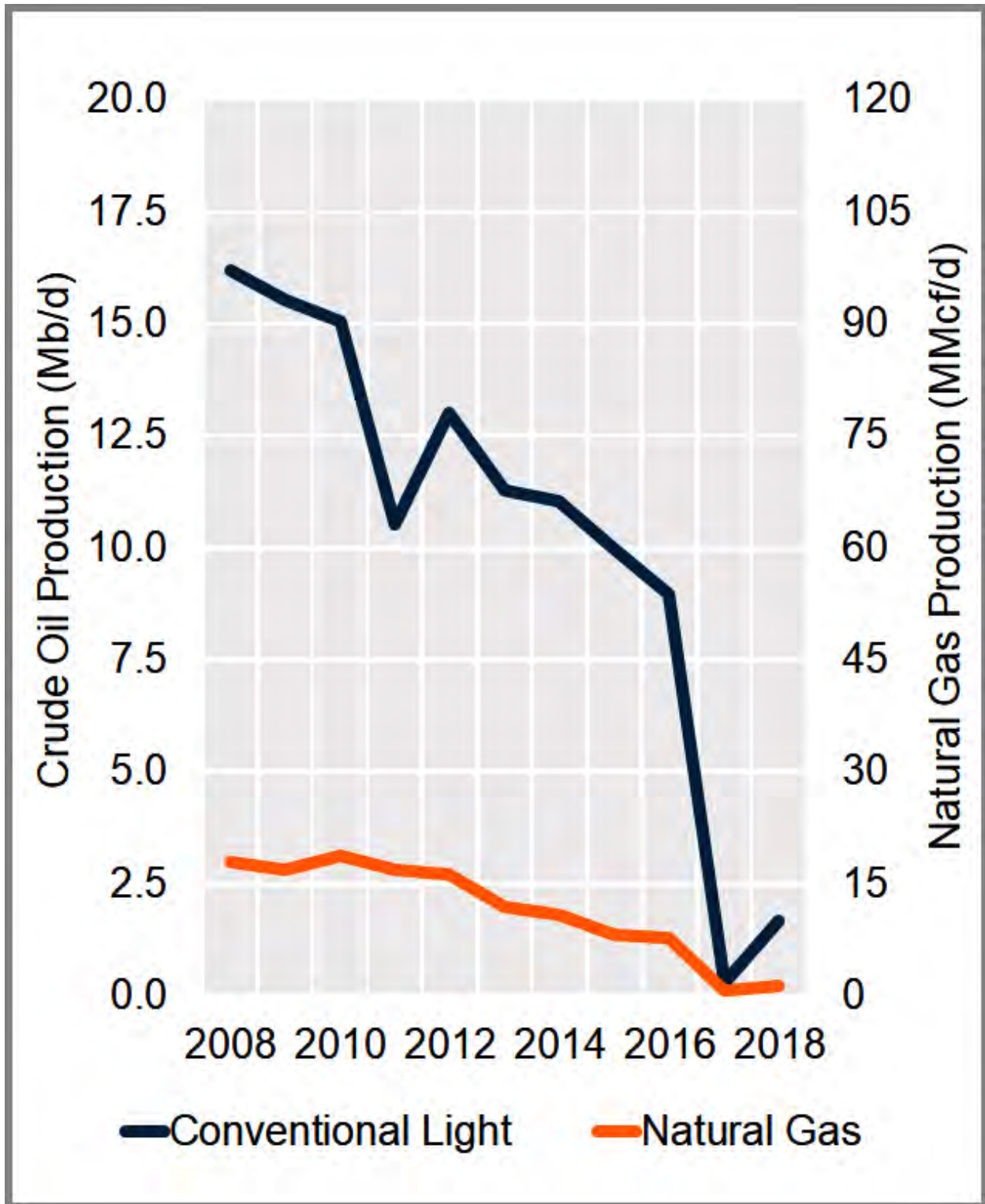
From the *Financial Post*:

The state of inactivity in Canada's Arctic is an outlier as the United States tries to encourage companies to resume exploring offshore Alaska, and as other Arctic countries such as Russia and Norway are actively developing their northern

frontiers despite concerns about climate change and melting sea ice.

Now, nobody likes pollution. And the climate is changing (as it continually does over time).

But modern extracting procedures are far safer than those of decades ago, back when the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline — designed to transport natural gas from the Beaufort Sea to tie into gas pipelines in northern Alberta — was first proposed in the early 1970s. It scrapped following Justice Thomas Berger's famous inquiry and later revived and left to linger in regulatory purgatory until finally being laid to rest in 2017.



Graphic shows oil and gas production in the NWT. From the federal government's Provincial and Territorial Energy Profiles.

But now our economy is in pandemic tatters.
Why not reignite it with the help of oil and gas?

Think about it: the Inuvik-Tuk Highway is completed and is set for some upgrades. The road goes through and nearby some major natural gas fields. That was part of the reason the road ever got green-lit many years ago (by a Conservative federal government) in the first place.

Export revenue. Hundreds of good jobs. We just need some damn better thinking from our elected officials. Yeah, those same Liberal slimeballs (too harsh?) who just cancelled Parliament to escape their latest scandal.

Might as well get used to living in a snow globe sitting with our hands out. Waiting for some 'green' energy projects. That could happen if the feds decide to invest in green projects to re-start

the economy, but how much money can the NWT realistically be expected to receive?

Want some more reality?

In 2018, the GNWT and federal government proudly announced an investment of \$40 million toward the Inuvik Wind Generation project.

In 2020, the Nihtat Gwich'in Council rejected that idea when it asked the Gwich'in Land and Water Board to not allow the construction of that wind turbine project as it is on reindeer grazing habitat.

So, there's that. Turns out it's not easy being green.

As I scanned various news stories, I found:

- The diamond mines are entering their last years of production. There are no new mines ready to provide the same number of high-paying jobs, contracts, taxes, royalties, and impact benefit agreements. There are projects pending, but it has been difficult to find investors.
- The construction sector is not as robust as it once was, now that the new Stanton Territorial hospital is finished. Tourism, largely dependent on international visitors — ironically, from China, epicentre of the ‘Rona — was our one bright hope, but COVID has put that sector into a coma for the foreseeable.
- The GNWT’s Industry, Tourism, and Investment department’s website still optimistically states it “promotes economic self-sufficiency through the responsible management and development of NWT petroleum resources to create a prosperous,

diverse and sustainable economy for the benefit of all NWT residents.”

That last bullet point really misses the mark, as there is no activity in the petroleum sector to responsibly manage. It’s just so 2015.

And the current group of MLAs in the NWT Legislative Assembly seem to be too concerned with stamping out scandals and infighting in its circular firing squad rather than developing the COVID-wracked economy.

In fact, with the ouster of its minister of Infrastructure and Industry, Tourism, and Investment essentially for being unable to play nicely with others, it will take the new minister weeks or months to get up to speed on the complicated files. And the new minister will not

have the career knowledge of the previous minister, Katrina Nokleby, a geological engineer.

But in any event, I just don't believe oil and gas extraction is a priority for the current Assembly.

OK, I know it. As I reviewed the Priorities of the 19th Legislative Assembly. Simply put, the GNWT has a lot of challenges and a lot of competing interests. Most of the priorities involved spending money the GNWT doesn't have and will have to go cap in hand to the feds for.

Priorities of the 19th Legislative Assembly

The 19th Legislative Assembly directs the Cabinet to work in partnership with Indigenous and Community governments to implement the following priorities for the benefit of the people of the Northwest Territories:

- Settle and implement treaty, land, resources, and self-government agreements.
- Implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Improve early childhood development indicators for all children.
- Advance universal child care by increasing availability and affordability.
- Increase student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada.
- Create a Polytechnic University.
- Increase regional decision-making authority.
- Reduce the municipal funding gap.
- Increase employment in small communities.
- Increase the number of affordable homes and reduce core housing need.
- Make strategic infrastructure investments that connect communities, expand the economy or reduce the cost of living, including the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Slave Geological Corridor and the Taltson Hydro Project.
- Increase economic diversification by supporting growth in non-extractive sectors and setting regional diversification targets.
- Increase resource exploration and development.
- Reduce the cost of power and increase the use of alternative and renewable energy.
- Ensure government procurement and contracting maximizes benefits to residents and businesses.
- Adopt a benefit retention approach to economic development.
- Increase the number of resident health care professionals by at least 20 per cent.
- Increase the number and variety of culturally respectful, community-based mental health and addictions programs, including aftercare.
- Enable seniors to age in place with dignity.
- Strengthen the government's leadership and authority on climate change.
- Ensure climate change impacts are specifically considered when making government decisions.
- Increase food security through locally produced, harvested, and affordable food.

The only bullet points in the priorities fact sheet that dealt with making money through resources extraction were:

- Increase economic diversification by supporting growth in non-extractive sectors and setting regional diversification targets.
- Increase resource exploration and development.
- Reduce the cost of power and increase the use of alternative and renewable energy.

So, yeah, not that hopeful. But the electorate was distracted by some shiny objects last fall when votes were cast, taking its collective eye off the ball. That ball being the territory's historic method of producing revenue and jobs with multi-sector resource extraction — minerals, diamonds, oil and gas. Lest we become even more dependent of federal government handouts.

Enjoy living in your perpetually struggling,
have-not snow globe, folks.

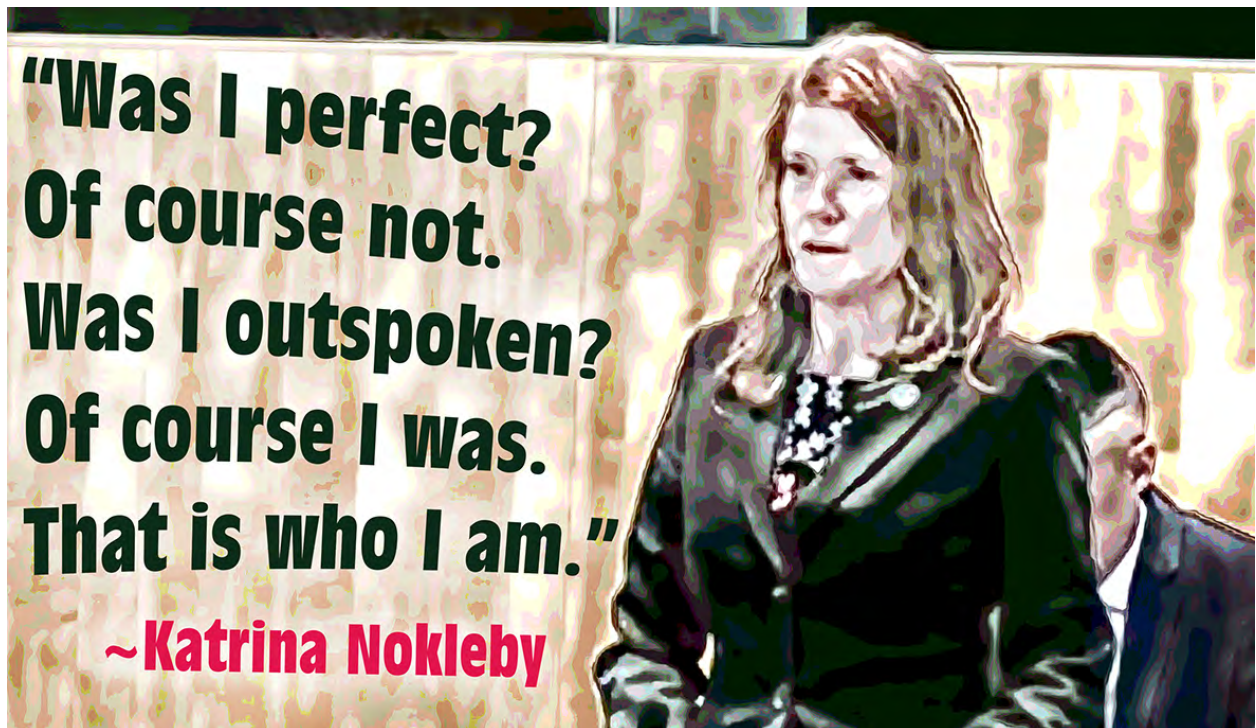
Posted on

September 4, 2020

Tags

GNWT, Mining, Resources Edit

A tragic tale of dysfunction and despair: #katrinagate



*Original image from NWT Legislative Assembly livestream on Wednesday,
Aug. 26.*

“Peace, order, and good government” —
From the Canadian Constitution

**“This process is embarrassing for all of us,
and it is embarrassing to the dignity of this
House.” — Minister Caroline Wawzonek**

**“We are going to take a lot of guff for this,
and we are, but it is life, and it is a life of a
politician, and sometimes, you have to make
that hard decision.” — Minister Shane
Thompson.**

**“Unfortunately, at this time, the relationship
between the premier, the cabinet ministers,
and Minister Nokleby is not functional and
cannot be repaired.” — Minister Diane Thom**

So wasn't that a party?

Nope. Not in any way.

Exposing another flaw in the consensus government model, a cabinet minister was forced to endure some two hours of searing and embarrassing criticism last week from her colleagues who sought to remove her from executive council.

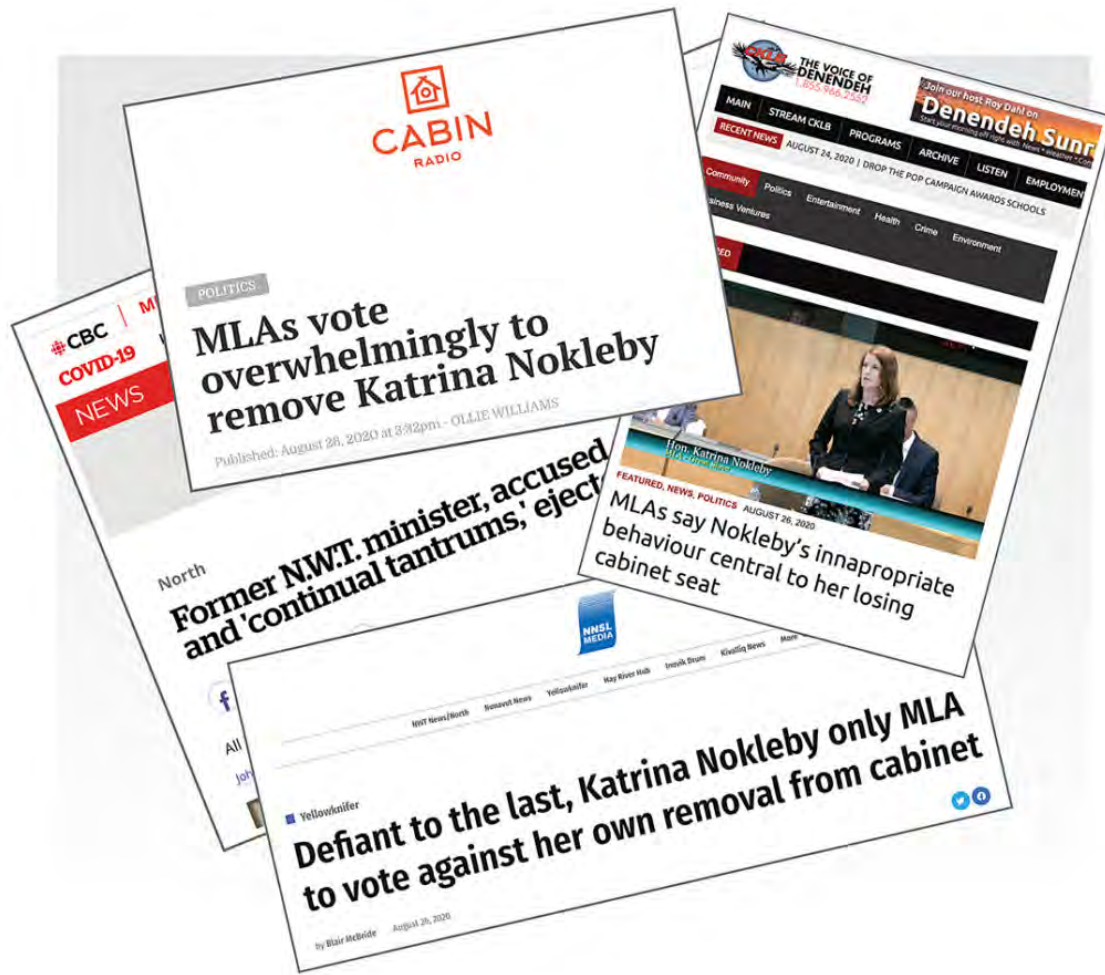
In a normal multi-party system derived from the British Westminster parliament traditions and practices, a first minister chooses his or her cabinet and simply removes a minister who is underperforming, placing them back onto the backbenches. Clean, quick and relatively humane.

But in our form of government, the premier can remove a minister's portfolios — which Caroline Cochrane did to Nokleby on Aug. 19 — but only the Legislative Assembly itself can vote one of

the executive council. Until that happens, a minister would be without work to do and a geographic region would be without an effective representative in cabinet.

So the week-long public melodrama starring Great Slave MLA Katrina Nokleby — formerly minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment — came to an end on Wednesday, which also meant

the retiring of the hashtag #katrinagate.



After enduring the 16,011 words spoken by ministers and regular MLAs against the rookie Great Slave rep in a motion to knock her out of executive council — a woman who is my MLA, who I have supported and will continue to do so

— and the 565 words Nokleby curtly offered in her defence, I can come to a few conclusions.

Drawing from comments made by MLAs and ministers on Hansard, I will offer two versions of the former geological engineer:

Since being elected last October, Nokleby was disrespectful and uncooperative to her elected co-workers, GNWT bureaucrats and constituents.

She openly expressed negative, degrading, and potentially harmful personal opinions about various public servants. While vicious rumours swirl routinely through the halls of the NWT Legislative Assembly building, Nokleby couldn't handle them and even fired staff based on unsubstantiated allegations. She was often seen yelling, being angry, and using vulgar language.

Nokleby also openly expressed negative, degrading, and potentially harmful personal opinions about various public servants. It put the government at legal risk and was also unfair to the staff, who were unable to defend themselves against someone with an unequal amount of power. This undermined the morale among the public service.

The minister couldn't control her explosive and shocking anger. She would have tantrums in meetings, before walking out. She violated confidentiality rules.

Nokleby lacked humility, refused to acknowledge her failings and instead blamed others — including Premier Cochrane, who moved the motion to expel her from executive council.

Nokleby skipped appearances before standing committees and was responsible for delays in

getting Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development SEED funding out the door to small business during the pandemic. Instead, Nokleby invested an inordinate amount of her time early in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic on sectors of our economy — large industries, such as mining — over which the Assembly has little to no control. Instead, she entered into public infrastructure agreements that worked against the interests of Northern companies.

Both the Tlicho and the Akaitcho governments condemned the inaction of the GNWT on addressing serious economic concerns related to the Nokleby's portfolios. She could have even caused lasting damage to the GNWT's relationship with the Tlicho and Akaitcho governments and also likely to other Indigenous governments

Meanwhile, Nokleby also ran her office poorly, with regular MLAs waiting weeks or months to get a reply to their routine inquiries, made on behalf of constituents.

Nokleby also wasn't transparent about her meetings with outside parties and occasionally didn't include departmental officials those meetings. Unrecorded meetings held without officials or any staff present is a significant danger to the essential trust and public confidence in the integrity of government's decision making. She claimed to be working to expose wrongdoing in government, but a minister does not fight against corruption by failing to record meetings with those seeking to influence you.

She entered in a bizarre contest for control over programs with one minister, clamouring for

announcements and subject matters she appeared to believe were exclusively hers.

In May, after a motion was made by the Accountability and Oversight Committee to oust Nokleby, which was withdrawn after a full-caucus meeting with the minister. She promised to address the group's concerns and manage her office in a way that was more responsive to the elected reps and their constituents.

She was told there had to be immediate improvement in her performance, but that promise was not fulfilled. If anything, the situation was worse.

The premier documented her attempts to help Nokleby get on track with both performance and behavioural issues, but the minister failed to make the necessary improvements. In fact, she was unable or unwilling to acknowledge when

she might be in error and cultivated a disrespectful workplace, where people didn't feel safe and free from harassment and intimidation.

It stands to reason, said one MLA, that in whatever workplace you work in, one should always feel safe and free from being verbally abused and insulted. In fact, some of the 18 politician expressed fear of to speaking too forcefully in support of the Nokleby removal motion, lest they be subject to wrath.

She had to go, as keeping her as a minister would damage not only cabinet, but will would harm the Assembly, the GNWT, and ultimately, the residents they serve.

Wow. How has Nokleby, ever managed to survive in polite society up until now? My goodness, did she coerce 454 people in the Great Slave constituency to vote for her? Threaten

them? Swear at them? Clearly, that's a rhetorical question. Fifty-three per cent of the 852 people who cast a ballot chose to send her to the Legislative Assembly.

Nokleby has a Bachelor of Applied Science as a Geological Engineer and was in leadership with the NT and NU Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists and the Association of Consulting Engineering Companies in the Northwest Territories.

She worked as a consultant in the environmental, earthworks, and ice engineering fields where she travelled extensively to sites throughout the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon.

She was even a leader with the Girl Guides of Canada and was a director of YWCA NWT.

But obviously, entering the world of politics has been a tough for her. Being in cabinet demands that one grins and bears it as compromises must be made and bureaucratic red tape is accepted, if not admired for strategic reasons (such as parking a thorny political issue with an academic-style study or investigation).



In the GNWT, given the fact elected reps often arrive into the Assembly as raw political rookies, with nothing else than basic life experiences to guide them, they really need time to sit as regular MLAs — in the consensus government's version of the opposition — to learn about being in elected office and mature as politicians.

Instead, without political parties to recruit and develop candidates, these green MLAs often land directly into cabinet. This means the deputy ministers, and other senior mandarins, control what happens. And can throw sticks in the spokes of the career of any minister they don't like.

This affords the premier immense power; more control than the consensus government model stipulates should happen. And did anyone really expect Caroline Cochrane to end up being our premier after the 2019 election? Another huge

problem with the existing consensus model — the people don't directly choose their premier.

But I digress. Back to Nokleby's Day of Hard Knocks in the emergency session of the Assembly.

There was also another portrait painted of the Great Slave MLA on that day. Weeding through the vitriol — and including some of her own words of defence — I offer an alternate version of events, again exclusively from Hansard:

Since being elected last October, and while suffering through the death of her mother and working around the extraordinary demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nokleby managed a lot of accomplishments and attracted many supporters.

She is a young, educated, and talented woman who worked to settle into her portfolios as a first-time minister; to manage her professional life in the midst of a pandemic, along with substantial personal challenges.

It's a job comes with a lot of pressure, stress, and never enough time. But there is no doubt that she worked hard to engage with many stakeholders and has done some great work with them.

One regular MLA could only imagine how difficult it to be for a cabinet minister to deal with the many complexities in managing her portfolios — never mind running two of the largest departments of the GNWT: the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment and the Department of Infrastructure.

Nokleby promoted large infrastructure projects as a way to generate benefits for

Northerners. She had also been working with construction companies in the Mackenzie Delta and when issues were brought forward, they received good responses. One MLA said he has a good working relationship with Nokleby and she did everything asked of her. In fact, he stated local leadership were happy with her when she travelled recently to Tuktoyaktuk on the Inuvik-Tuk highway.

Another said Nokleby is more than capable of achieving a better understanding of the treaties with Indigenous people and how to uphold treaty commitments, even if there is little time for on-the-job learning of those complex matters.

Other MLAs said they witnessed Nokleby behave inappropriately and stated they have positive working relationship with her.

It was said the new government had inherited some bad habits of in-fighting from previous Assemblies. Rules of confidentiality have provoked questions from the public on the ministerial expulsion process, and they would remain confidential and hidden from the public.

In fact, all members agreed to take appropriate steps to protect the confidentiality of personal (or was that personnel?) information and other confidential information before Wednesday's public session. One MLA said he did not believe the public interest or Nokleby's own privacy would be served with exposing all of the details to public scrutiny.

Nokleby ran for cabinet on a platform of change and made promises to do whatever she could to improve the lives of the people she represents and the lives of every resident of the Northwest Territories.

The rookie with experience

Katrina Nokleby, one of our 2020 Names to Know

By Herb Mathisen | July 20, 2020



Katrina Nokleby, minister of industry, tourism and investment, Northwest Territories. Courtesy of Katrina Nokleby

Katrina Nokleby, the Northwest Territories' new industry, tourism and investment minister, already had her work cut out for her with the diamond mining sector winding down and uncertainty about what would replace it. Then came COVID-19, ramping the degree of difficulty up to a whole new level.

She worked hard to make positive changes in her departments wherever she could. But she admitted she stayed true to who she is and could not accept that things should stay the same simply because that is just the way that things have always been done.

She had many concerns with current practices, including what she calls a gaming of the system. She admitted she wasn't perfect and defended being outspoken. She wanted to get things done as quickly and efficiently as possible for the people who sorely need the services and support of government.

She was frustrated by the level of secrecy demanded by current conventions, especially at the cabinet level. She rejected the idea that consensus government requires such extreme levels of secrecy.

Secrecy and innuendo, she believed, are the hallmarks of corruption and backroom dealings, not the transparent and accountable government that the public deserves. That the toxic culture of secrecy allowed her character and professionalism to be disparaged, while not allowing her to respond, reply, or defend herself.

She lashed back at being unfairly admonished without any due process and based on nothing more than gossip, hearsay, rumours, and bruised feelings.

However, in the end, after enduring the type of performance review or job evaluation typically conducted between an employer and an employee in private in a awkward and uncomfortable public process, she said she will look forward to working with her colleagues as a regular MLA.

And some MLAs said Nokleby does not have anything to be ashamed of and that she should hold her head high through this after was all said and done. In fact, some said they will welcome her to their side of the Assembly.

Many said they looked forward to moving beyond Wednesday's motion and to refocus their attention on the lives of the Northerners that they serve. Said one MLA: We've still got housing; we've still got jobs; we've still got an economy to worry about. I'd rather be talking to that than to dealing with these types of matters.

Said another on pressing issues that need to be addressed: "Indigenous people being incarcerated at disturbing rates, Indigenous children being placed in foster care at alarming rates, Indigenous people with high rates of addictions with limited support, Indigenous people without housing, Indigenous people

passed up for employment opportunities, Indigenous-owned businesses being treated differently, and Indigenous graduation rates waning.”

The results of the recorded vote: 16 in favour, one opposed, one abstention. The motion was carried.

On Thursday, after arguing over the two from the North, two from Yellowknife, two from the South convention on the regional distribution of cabinet, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green was acclaimed into cabinet. While I have had my differences with the left-wing politician — mostly over her support of the failing and disruptive experiment to merge a sobering centre and a day shelter right downtown — I think she will bring some good experience and maturity into cabinet.



However, she has to be given the proper portfolios, or else the territory's economy could be placed at further risk. She would make a great minister of Social Services, Persons with Disabilities, Homelessness and Seniors. How's that for an appropriate portfolio?

So Cochrane will have to shuffle her cabinet. I expect that will be done soon.

But apart from arranging chairs on the Titanic, nothing of any real consequence will happen in the coming months and years under our consensus form of government.

Consensus decision-making harkens back to early Indigenous societies. So I understand how it was though a form of it would be appropriate for the NWT, as it is different from the colonial multi-party system. But in Canada, only Nunavut and Nunatsiavut, an autonomous area in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, use consensus government.

So how is the NWT, with its 50/50 split of Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents and its economic promise with resource extraction — supposed to compete effectively with all the

other southern jurisdictions. And even Yukon, for that matter, which has a traditional multi-party system.

A consensus process works well with very small groups, such as municipal governments, non-profit organizations, worker cooperatives and school councils. Consensus governments are also found in the Pacific island nations of Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, as well as the ancient Tynwald of the Isle of Man.

A consensus government effectively serves as a permanent minority government.

Consensus government is also more appropriate in non-partisan democracies in which a majority of politicians are independent. But it's quite clear as to which party most of our MLAs are affiliated with. Some even publicly align with, or

otherwise support, politicians at the federal level.

From Wikipedia:

- The consensus government model has received criticism on various grounds, including that it hampers long-term political and economic development in the territory because the lack of political parties mean that there is no mechanism to carry over a political agenda from one assembly to the next.
- It complicates the ability of less wealthy citizens to serve in the assembly because the lack of political parties means that election candidates must raise all of their campaign funds on their own.
- It prevents the voters from being able to demand or vote for systemic change, since there is no mechanism to replace an

ineffective or underperforming government with another alternative.

- It hampers efforts to improve diversity in representation, such as the election of more women and ethnic minorities to the legislature.

In 2018, states Wikipedia, then-MLA Kieron Testart introduced an amendment to the territorial Elections Act to permit the introduction of party politics in the legislative assembly, but his motion received no support from other MLAs and was dropped.

In 2019, he planned to organize a group of ideologically aligned MLA candidates in the 2019 Northwest Territories general election into a “Liberal Democratic” slate, but backed off of the plan after it was leaked to the press.

A CBC North analysis in 2013 stated the other major criticism is that without party politics, elections are often decided based on personal or family connections rather than major issues. It's up to individual candidates to present a platform, but with no party to back them, election promises will be unconvincing, stated the CBC. A lot of Assembly time is taken up with candidates comparatively minor local issues, instead of looking at the long-term big picture.

So where does this leave Katrina Nokleby and her constituents in Great Slave? Judging from the outpouring of support she has received on social media, she still has a solid base of support. Obviously, she needs to mend some fences with her colleagues. She has now made history, as noted by David Wasylciw, who runs OpenNWT, the first time a premier has stripped a minister of their portfolios as a result of poor performance, rather than behaviours outside of work.

I think she will be a killer regular MLA.
Whatever minister assumes her former portfolios better be on their toes, as she will be watching them closely. Judging from what I've read and heard about her, she will also be a welcome voice of reason in the unofficial opposition. Nokleby will also have more time to attend to concerns of the folks in Great Slave.



Nokleby meeting with Great Slave constituents after being elected last fall.

So why didn't Nokleby just quit executive council after Cochrane stripped her of her portfolios? She could have just read the clear writing on the wall and slipped over to the opposition side without having to endure Nokleby's Day of Hard Knocks? Maybe she thought a Seinfeldesque "Airing of grievances" would bring a Festivus miracle to the problematic GNWT and Legislative Assembly?

Maybe she thought she would be able to reveal more than she was legally able to? You know, name names and expose what she considered to be the rot and corruption. But that never happened.

If I were Nokleby, I would accept the invitation offered by some of the regular MLAs to work with her and be welcome into the opposition. I don't think this is the end for this Assembly's public dysfunction and she needs to be there to

fight for those of us who want real change and real hope.

***UPDATE:** A couple of hours after posting, I fixed a pull quote from Minister Thom at the top. A sharp-eyed reader noted it had been clipped short, changing the intent. That happened by mistake when I was copying passages from Hansard. I strive for accuracy and am always happy to hear feedback at: mail@unlimitedjames.media*

Posted on

August 29, 2020

Tags

Cabinet, GNWT, MLAs, Nokleby, NWTpoli Edit