

# Archive of City Blog

May 2019 to  
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# No defunding of police, but NWT's justice is being adjusted



Hon. Caroline Wawzonek  
Minister of Finance

**“While it may initially have been a global pandemic that illustrated the need for out-of-the-box thinking as it pertains to our justice and policing systems, it has been society’s recent awakening to the reality of racial injustice that has driven this home.”** — *NWT Justice Minister Caroline Wawzonek, Minister’s Policing Priorities for 2020 – 2021, delivered to the Legislative Assembly in June.*

The global pandemic could leave some lasting positive side-effects on the territory’s justice system.

Easier access to bail and use of videoconferencing to help accused persons stay in their communities before trial are two new policies being considered to be made permanent that I’ve learned about.

A lawyer told me that Yellowknife's North Slave Correctional Complex has set up video terminals so that prisoners can see family members during remote visits. He said it "takes a bit of the sting" out of being incarcerated so far from home and family.

Also, calls for a residential treatment centre in the NWT for those struggling with addictions have apparently been heard. Sort of.

And the territory could emerge from COVID-19 restrictions around the same time as an updated Corrections Act will be fully implemented.

NWT Justice Minister Caroline Wawzonek recently told a national legal magazine her government has managed since March to reduce the remand population by 63 per cent and its overall inmate population by 30 per cent.

Those efforts to protect inmates and staff from the disease by reducing the number of people behind bars could become the norm, as they answer a (pre-pandemic) national call to reduce the number of Indigenous people behind bars.

From that story in The Lawyer's Daily:

*In a strong show of co-operation, lawyers with the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, who serve as the territory's only Crown counsel, worked closely with members of the defence bar to craft consent releases where appropriate, and inmate applications for temporary absence were fast-tracked.*

While there are still a number of breached conditions seen daily in Justice of the Peace Court in Yellowknife, local RCMP spokesperson Julie Plourde told me police "haven't notice a trend in terms of criminality in our

communities,” since the new policy has been in place.

Since a major round of national justice reforms in the mid-1990s, efforts have been focussed on reducing the number of Indigenous persons from ending up behind bars. More than two decades later, the situation has only grown worse.

Alternatives to incarceration were deemed necessary back then, given the reality that Indigenous offenders were overrepresented compared to the rest of the population. The groundbreaking Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, started in 1988, found at that time although Indigenous persons made up only 12 per cent of the population of that province, they comprised over 50 per cent of the prison inmates. Nationally, Indigenous people represented about two-per-cent of the

population, but represented almost 11 per cent of persons behind bars.

Three decades later, despite making up just five per cent of the general population, Indigenous people make up 30 per cent of prison population.

As calls grow for reforms to policing and justice systems across the globe, the NWT's updated Corrections Act — passed last August and hoped to be fully implemented by spring/summer 2021 — contains some new measures that could be the answer to some demands made by justice-reform advocates.

Those include a local group supporting the US-based Black Lives Matter movement. Now, whether the average person who marched through the streets of Yellowknife earlier this year were doing so in support of the marxist political organization, or simply in

sympathy of those people of colour who have suffered illegally at the hands of police, is up for debate. I mean, Black Lives Matter is a radical group. Black lives matter (lower case) is a statement that can't be argued with.

But I digress.

In late July, while collecting information for a possible Cabin Radio story, I posed a series of questions to communications staff for Wawzonek and other elements of the justice system. While I didn't receive enough new information for a full story, I think I have enough for an interesting overview blog, looking at the evolution of the NWT justice system.

*To whom... good day,*



*Having read Justice Minister Caroline Wawzonek's recent interview in The Lawyer's Daily, I have a few questions ... with excerpts from The Lawyer's Daily in bold:*

***The measures have helped the NWT government reduce its remand population by 63 per cent since March and its overall inmate population by 30 per cent, said Wawzonek.***

*Q: Is this going to be a permanent policy? Has there been any feedback, or hard numbers, regarding recidivism as a result of the number of normally incarcerated folks receiving interim judicial release or temporary absences? Keep in mind, I cover the courts daily and have been analyzing the dockets and especially keeping an eye on bail court.*

***Because of the nature of the federal-territorial funding agreement with the RCMP, so called***

***“defunding” the police is not necessarily an option in the NWT, said Wawzonek.***

*Q; The minister met with organizers of the Black Lives Matter march. Did that group have any actual and specific suggestions/demands apart from “defund” the police? If so, please tell me. And will any of that group’s specific demands be included in future policy changes? And, as an aside, does the minister realize exactly what the group Black Lives Matter stands for? Has she read the group’s website (US and Canada)? Does she agree with the group’s stated political position and ultimate goals?*

***In some respects, said Wawzonek, the territory’s justice system can be a model for other parts of Canada. Its updated Corrections Act, passed in August 2019, focuses less on punishment and more on the rehabilitation and community reintegration of offenders.***

*Q: Regarding the new Corrections Act, is the full act still expected to be implemented in the winter of 2021? What form will public education on the new Act take and when can we expect to see some of that communications? What areas of the new act does the Minister believe the public needs to know?*

*Q: I would like some information on how which facility is being converted: What changes are being made, either with programming, staffing, or physical space alterations; who will be incarcerated there; who will decide the convicted person will be sent there; and have the judges been informed of this change? How extensive will addictions counselling be in this “therapeutic community,” as alcohol and drug abuse appear to be behind the great majority of criminal activity in the NWT? Of course, there has been extensive debate about whether we*

*need a residential treatment centre in the territory.*

*I'm not in any super rush for this — I'd prefer detailed answers that some time has been spent on — so some time tomorrow would be fine. I am also contacting other parties for comment.*

*Thanking you in advance for response to my inquiries...*

I received an answer to one of my questions. At least I was given a statement I could attribute to the minister. The GNWT's Cabinet Communications office has come under criticism from an MLA and other media in recent months, but I suppose the staff was correct to punt me over to the justice department. CabComm deals with policy and politics. The bureaucracy handles the nuts-and-bolts type of questions.

*Hi James,*

*To answer your second question, the below can be attributed to Minister Wawzonek.*

*“While we’ve unfortunately been unable to arrange a meeting with the organizers of the Yellowknife Black Lives Matter march as of yet, I look forward to hearing directly from them about their concerns and suggested areas of reform within the justice system here in the NWT.”*

*Your other questions are best suited for the Department of Justice for a response. You can reach out to Sue Glowach and she’d be happy to assist you.*

*Thank you,*

*Trista Haugland*

So I went to Glowach, a spokesperson for the Department of Justice, who was, indeed, happy to assist me. Her office provided the following from Ngan Trinh, a senior communications advisor:

- *There have been several measures taken during the COVID pandemic to reduce the number of people in remand at NWT facilities. These include the cooperation of all parties in the justice system to ensure that only people who are a threat to public safety are remanded. As well, the courts are pursuing measures to keep accused persons in the community of arrest until their show cause hearing has been completed. In this way persons are only transported to Yellowknife and held at NSCC if they have been remanded. As Minister Wawzonek stated in the Lawyer's Daily article, we are striving to continue to maintain and improve*

*systems that have demonstrated their success.*

- *The Hay River South Mackenzie Correctional Centre (SMCC) has work underway to convert to a Therapeutic Community model. This model has been presented to the town of Hay River, the members of the Legislative Assembly and other stakeholders in fall 2019. Under this model, substance abuse is seen as a symptom of much broader problems and as such, a holistic approach is used that touches on every aspect of an offender's life. With an emphasis on social learning and mutual self-help, individual participants take on some of the responsibility for their peers' recovery. Providing help and support to others is seen as an important part of changing oneself under this model. A northern model has been created based on other successful facilities such as this in BC.*

- *To establish a therapeutic community at the SMCC, the facility required security enhancements to the perimeter fence and interior building. Placement in the therapeutic community at the SMCC will be based on an inmate's security classification and programming needs. A screening process conducted by case managers will identify suitable inmates for placement at the therapeutic community. The SMCC currently has sufficient staffing to transition to a therapeutic community. Staff will receive the required training in order to provide effective supervision and guidance to offenders in the therapeutic community. Programming at the SMCC will continue to focus on factors that lead to criminal behaviour for offenders, which includes substance abuse programming. The SMCC has a psychologist on staff as well as traditional counsellors who provide counselling services to offenders.*



So, to recap, the territory is inching ever so closer to having a residential treatment centre. Call it a “therapeutic community,” or whatever, a facility such as this is sorely needed. At present, the only option is to ship addicts who have come into contact with the law down south for treatment. This is part of the push in the updated Corrections Act to focus less on punishment and more on the rehabilitation and community reintegration of offenders.

And for whatever reason, Wawzonek’s promised meeting with “local Black Lives Matter organizers” — having likely been pressured to do so by regular MLAs, in the overheated rush to stay current with the headlines across North America following the death of George Floyd in May at the hands of

Minneapolis police — hasn't materialized. Or at least it hadn't by earlier this month.

Wawzonek did acknowledge in the Legislative Assembly that systemic racism within the RCMP exists. She stated “promoting confidence in policing remains a priority.”

The Lawyer's Daily noted the RCMP provides policing services to the NWT under a funding agreement with the federal government that will see the territory's policing services budget reach \$47.8 million this year. The RCMP has detachments in 21 of the territory's 33 communities.

“There is a history where the RCMP were the bringers of law enforcement and the bringers of justice into the North,” Wawzonek told the magazine. “So there's a history here we have to reckon with. The upside is we're trying to

reckon with it and we're going to reckon with it and the RCMP, I believe, can be partners in that. I don't think they're shying away from that conversation, notwithstanding it's going to be difficult and the solutions are going to take some time."

Because of the nature of the federal-territorial funding agreement with the RCMP, the magazine continued, so called "defunding" the police is not necessarily an option in the NWT.

The moves to keep non-violent accused in their communities prior to their cases reaching trial is positive for everyone involved. The next hurdle will be for the GNWT to improve access to reliable broadband internet access to ensure those remote bail and remand hearings can continue without throwing sticks into the wheels of justice.

Wawzonek, a strong proponent of restorative justice — something I first wrote about as a novel experiment being tried by the Crown in Manitoba in the late 1990s — said she would like to see other alternative forms of justice play a bigger role in the territory.

This meshes well with what I have learned about traditional Indigenous “justice” procedures, which is to restore the peace and equilibrium within the community, and to reconcile the accused with his or her own conscience and with the individual or family who has been wronged. We now call that restorative justice.

“Restorative justice as a philosophy can really be introduced from the starting point all the way through, and I’m looking for what levers I can pull because I don’t control the Criminal Code,” Wawzonek told the magazine.

“I do hope that we can continue to evolve our justice response in the North. There are a lot of things we do really well here, and there’s a lot of opportunity because of our really strong sense of community and a strong sense of respect between communities.”

Posted on

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Tags

courts, GNWT, Justice, Police, Politics Edit

**What's so funny  
about peace, love and  
understanding?**



*RCMP officers were called to the front of Shoppers Drug Mart recently to remove a man who had been swearing and yelling as he panhandled. While he is a well-known member of the city's homeless population, and is usually not aggressive towards passersby, on this day he was taken away by the cops without incident. Likely to the downtown Sobering Centre/Day Shelter. This is the routine type of police work that is called for by our current laws and society. But some protesters are calling for police to be "defunded," which has different meanings, but what would be the actual results?*

As a commentator on politics, justice and issues of the day, you would think I have a lot to say about the current state of social unrest in Canada and the United States. And I do. But at the same time, I don't.

The old me would simply wade into the bedlam and start throwing (word) bombs. The newer and wiser self doesn't wish to get cancelled or otherwise blacklisted by the take-no-prisoners movement currently sinking its teeth into anyone

— or anything, hello statues and street names — it doesn't appreciate.

However, the movement — called a “mob” by some, but I won't do that — has also devised a nifty trap for people who just want to live their lives and stay out of politics and social causes. The “silence is violence” meme means unless you indicate your allegiance to the wide-range of issues the movement espouses — even if you do so insincerely, just as insurance against cancellation — you are some kind of evil devil who needs to be called out.

That is actually quite a nifty ploy by the left to smoke folks on the right out from underneath their rocks. Even if you are a very nice person without any real ill feelings towards anyone who just want to live your life in peace. Along with some love and understanding.



You see, entire swaths of people on the right have gone underground, so to speak, as they've discovered it's safest to speak your mind silently. One fun thing that is happening — mostly in the US — is that the right outright lies to pollsters. It gives their political opponents a false sense of security that feeds an outsized bravado which might not be realized in come election time.

So yes, I am being very careful with what I write when it comes to certain matters these days. But I also still believe some things need to be said, as we still do live in a free society and enjoy a certain quantum of free speech. At the same time, I don't want to be overly secure in my beliefs. I want to be constantly testing and re-testing my assumptions: “Am I sure I'm right about that? Am I missing something?”

As I wrote here last time, I respect police and do enjoy knowing they will be there if I need them.

I admitted I have white privilege and enjoy a different relationship with authorities than many other people do in my community.

Being right wing is also fraught with problems these days. I have always professed to being a Red Tory. In general terms, that means I support politicians who espouse financial responsibility and, at the same time, strong social supports. It means I want my tax dollars spent wisely by smaller government who believes its primary function is the safety and security of ALL of its citizens. But at the same time, I share values of my left-wing friends who don't like pollution, are against racism, are pro-choice and believe there should be strong social safety nets for those on the margins, including Indigenous people who suffer from intergenerational trauma as a result of white colonists.

I don't appreciate the fact that white-supremacists exist on the fringe of the right-wing. But what do those moderates on the left — Blue Liberals? — feel about the radicals on the extreme of their movement? Those people who blow up pipelines, smash windows and riot at political summits and, on a more clandestine level, espouse one-sided political views in publicly funded schools?

In local high schools there are examples of teachers who swing to the left. Students need to have a broad, fair and wide-ranging education. If they are being allowed out of class to protest against climate change, is there other material being offered in class to offer realistic perspectives from an economic or business case? Nobody likes dirty air or contaminated water, but especially in the North, we also need to stay warm in winter and there are no practical green

solutions at the moment to replace diesel power generation for many communities.

Also important for educators and parents is to fully explain what the latest American political/social movement is all about. Teachers should want to explain the linguistics concept of semantic overload. That's when a word or phrase has more than one meaning. In my example below, just by capitalizing the words in the same phrase, different meanings are conveyed.

- **Black lives matter.** Yes. Of course they do. That is simply a statement of fact. That includes the social movement to combat racism. And in Canada that can be extended to Indigenous lives matter and the cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls matter.
- **Black Lives Matter.** No. Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. is a well-funded Marxist

global political organization in the US, UK, and Canada. But by just reading its website, it doesn't sound so evil. And social media search algorithms don't provide honest search results. Do some better research. Google "Black Lives Matter marxist" and you will discover that Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. is anti-capitalist and anti-cop. People who don't educate themselves about this are the useful idiots for Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. Brilliantly, it has wrapped its product into a statement that nobody disagrees with. It's arguably the best marketing scheme in history. But our kids — and many adults, for that matter — need to understand what they are buying in to. The protests/riots in the US are all tied into the upcoming election there. It's all Orange Man Bad. An excuse to destabilize the country and improve the left's chances of winning in November. If black lives really mattered to Black Lives Matter Inc., it would be

protesting Black murders in Democrat-run cities such as Chicago, which last weekend saw a five children among the 14 people killed in separate shootings. So when you are making posters for a protest, consider whether you want to state: “Black lives matter,” or “Black Lives Matter.”

But I digress. Back to the situation in our beautiful territory.

I’ve been reading as much material as I can about the current social/political situation in the NWT and have found some informative and encouraging statements and analysis that offer perspective and solutions.

Consider this passage from a *News/North* story on June 19 by Blair McBride:

NWT society has made progress in addressing racism compared to several decades ago, said Deh Gah Got'ie First Nation Chief Joachim Bonnetrouge, but a lot more work remains. Bonnetrouge has borne the brunt of racism since he was a child.

*“(There were) some institutions like residential schools, where we got the full tilt and the European and church beliefs were forced on us. You grow up discriminated against, you’re told that your people are no good,” he said.*

*“When I was a child, holy, man, it was racist. I wasn’t proud of being Dene or being Native. I’m not proud to say it but I hated white people. But now I’m also proud to say that I have lots of white people who are my friends and I have a lot of respect for them.”*

*Even the old term “Indian” was a sign for Bonnetrouge that the ignorance of Canadians was part of the daily language used around him.*

*“We’re educated about how in 1492 Christopher Columbus came here, which he thought was India. And lo and behold he landed on our shores. From that day the newcomers have been calling us Indians. For guys like that me that’s offensive. Indians (are from) India, not here. From that perspective we’ve gotten used to racism. It’s not good but now we have to deal with it.”*

*The more respectful terms of “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” replaced “Indian” years ago, but Bonnetrouge said prejudice is still there even though it’s well-hidden.*

*“Sometimes when you go to Yellowknife or Grande Prairie it’s kind of inert. You just take it*



*with a grain of salt, knowing full well it could flare up. If there's drinking or drug use it can become black and brown versus white. It's a big, serious issue," he said.*

Bonnetrouge went on to say he found that meeting people different than him through cross-cultural workshops helped cut through the racism. He was speaking of workshops decades ago, circles of a few dozen people just “finding out about each other on any subject matter and how to make a better world.”

Now that would be something for an organization — or maybe the GNWT? — to champion right now. An ongoing series of meetings in cities towns and villages across the territory. I would love to participate and listen. And, hopefully, learn how to be a better friend and neighbour.

MP Michael McLeod spoke out last week on the topic of policing in the North. While I usually don't perk up when this Liberal speaks, his words this time did make a lot of sense to me.

Here's an excerpt from a June 19 *Yellowknifer* story by Simon Whitehouse:

*“I think over the last couple of weeks we've all seen shocking and unsettling violence from police forces and I've been reminded of the pattern of violence, and racism endured by minority populations and Indigenous people across the country,” McLeod said in an interview. “It's not something that's completely new. For centuries, Indigenous people have been subjected to systemic racism and injustice by law enforcement.*

*McLeod said it's important that people remember the history of the RCMP in the North hasn't always been a positive one and that much of that legacy remains today. He noted, for example, that RCMP came to Northern communities to take children away to residential schools and were responsible for charging people for shooting ducks and geese in the spring when people were going hungry — all part of government policies.*

*“So it's always been a tough history and I think most of us in the North know people (who) have friends or family that have been roughed up by the police and sometimes beaten up by the police,” he said. “We have many hard working police that are very involved in our communities, and they work to perform their duties with integrity, respect and professionalism. But we can't shy away from the reality that Indigenous people have been and are still being treated*

*somewhat unfairly by Canada's institutions and police forces."*

In that story, McLeod addressed the latest American catchphrase — oddly heard recently during a rally in Yellowknife — to “defund the police.” McLeod noted there are a dozen of the NWT's 33 communities who don't have a regular police presence.

“I'd be hard-pressed to tell those communities that we need to defund the policing services,” he said. “We need police services to ensure people's safety, but we also need mental health programs. We need addiction services. We need so many other things to complement what policing service does.”

McLeod suggested a First Nations' policing system — such as is in place in Yukon — could be an answer for communities without a

detachment of Mounties. McLeod also said he would also like to see more government support for integrated case management projects, which work with high-risk offenders with complex needs like mental health and alcohol and drug addictions. That makes complete and total sense. So get to work, Mr. McLeod.

As Cabin Radio reported in March, integrated case management uses GNWT staff “pathfinders” who help people navigate a labyrinth of paperwork and programs related to justice, health, social services, education and housing.

As for criticizing the cops, sure there are a few bad cops. There are also some bad lawyers, bad doctors, bad tradespeople, bad dogs — and bad/biased journalists.

In the case of the latter, let me explore a story that emerged — and evolved — rather quickly in the city recently.

From what I have read, it appears a Yellowknife man made a false report to police about being face-stomped by a cop. In these times of hating on the cops for the few who might be overly aggressive when dealing with Indigenous people — sure, that happens once in a while and it's damn wrong — making such an inflammatory allegation is as dangerous as it is illegally mischievous.

You can read the stories here by Cabin Radio, CBC, CKLB and *Yellowknifer*. Appreciate the differences in the headline wording from each outlet.

The content of each story is pretty much the same. As I did, you can draw your own conclusions to what happened to Benjamin Manuel. But it looks as if he was mugged and beaten in a city park, then made a false claim about police brutality.

Excerpts from Cabin Radio's coverage:

*The man claims he was walking home that evening when police “just picked me up, beat me up, and threw me to the side of the road” behind Kim’s Confectionery, on the corner of Franklin Ave and 54 St.*

*After the allegations were made public, witnesses came forward who claimed they saw Manuel being assaulted by a group of people, who were not police officers, on June 10.*

*One witness, who asked not to be named, said they saw three men kick Manuel in the head, face, and ribs while he was on the ground outside City Hall that night.*

*The witness said the attackers left when they heard sirens and Manuel had walked away by the time RCMP and medical services arrived.*

However, the RCMP maintains officers never encountered him that day at all. Without witnesses, video or any other real evidence — and the fact people have been charged for allegedly attacking the man — I have no other choice but to believe what the RCMP is stating. I also note the man originally made his allegation on Facebook — he did not make a complaint to the police or the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP.



The cops are so worried about making mistakes in what could be a powder keg of a story, they actually did make a communications mistake in what appears to be a push to get the media release out before the National Indigenous Peoples Day long weekend. Hitting ‘send’ before having all your ducks in a row is a bad look, folks. You can’t tell media to “disregard and delete” a release once they have it. Good grief.

Yellowknife detachment commander Insp. Alex Laporte stated in the release: “We continue to work with the victim, to support him through the trauma of an assault.” Okay, that’s nice. But what about his false report? Did he actually provide bogus information to police? That’s a crime, folks. Will he be charged, or is the current anti-cop climate too intense for equal justice under the law to be applied in this case?

Now I wouldn't want to live in a true north, cop and free. I do strongly believe the police need help to allow them to do their jobs better. There needs to be an expansion of mental-health crisis teams, more effective anti-racism training for trainees in the RCMP Depot in Regina and regular refresher courses for all Mounties, as the job will grind down the best of them over time.

But let's look beyond the immediate headlines about the cops. Why is there interaction between them and the people in the first place? Poverty, drugs, booze, mental health and illiteracy. A lack of strong connections to cultural roots. And a paucity of employment opportunities. It can all lead to criminality.

C'mon folks, we can pull things together. We don't have to devolve into the race riots that have no end in sight in the United States. We

don't need extremism to see real change take place.

What we need are better leaders. Look who is in charge now and who has been in charge. Who has made things better for you, you friends, family and community? Get past the rhetoric and really think about it.

And then get involved. Press you elected officials to make the change you want. Start a petition. Run for office or find someone to run for office who represents your positions. Marching in the streets is fine, it makes headlines, but don't start physically destroying the very community you want to make better, as is being done in the US. Heck, we've already lost pretty much the only statue we had in the city. And that was some time ago.

For now, consider the lyrics from this song — a hit from my youth written by Nick Lowe and subsequently covered by Elvis Costello — which rings ever so true right now.

**(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love, and Understanding?**

*As I walk through this wicked world*

*Searchin' for light in the darkness of insanity*

*I ask myself, "Is all hope lost?"*

*Is there only pain and hatred and misery?"*

*And each time I feel like this inside*

*There's one thing I wanna know*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

*And as I walk on through troubled times*

*My spirit gets so downhearted sometimes*

*So where are the strong and who are the trusted?*

*And where is the harmony, sweet harmony?*

*'Cause each time I feel it slippin' away*

*Just makes me wanna cry*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

*So where are the strong and who are the trusted?*

*And where is the harmony, sweet harmony?*

*'Cause each time I feel it slippin' away*

*Just makes me wanna cry*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

*What's so funny 'bout peace, love and understanding?*

Posted on

June 24, 2020

Tags

Justice, Politics, Protests, RCMP Edit

# NOTES/QUOTES

**#20: Electoral reform;  
cop talk; and justice  
reform**



*The NWT Legislative Assembly in its COVID-19 seating configuration.*

*Image from GNWT livestream.*

It's quite interesting to see others catching on to the fact that the 19th edition of the NWT Legislative Assembly is proving to be quite special in its level of dysfunction. But instead of continuing to point fingers at specific people — it's not really their fault — I suggest it would be much better to address the real problem: this experiment with a consensus style of government isn't working.



The NWT is only one of three jurisdictions in the country using this style of government over the traditional style incorporating political parties. The other two are Nunavut and Nunatsiavut, the latter being an autonomous area claimed by Inuit in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think the NWT is just too large an area — in terms of physical size and with a population of 44,900 people, half of them in Yellowknife — with too many complex issues to be managed properly by a consensus style of government.

In theory, consensus government sounds just dreamy. Here's how the GNWT describes itself:

- In our system, all members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are elected as independents.

- Members who are not in cabinet are referred to as regular members. They become the “unofficial opposition.”
- Compared to the party system, there is much more communication between regular members and cabinet.
- All legislation, major policies, and proposed budgets pass through the Regular Members’ standing committees before coming to the House.
- This gives members a chance to make changes and put their “fingerprints” on initiatives before they’re made public, unlike in other systems.
- This influence comes at a price for regular members: they often get advance notice of announcements and issues before the public does, but can’t tell their constituents.
- The 11 regular members also hold the balance of power, as only seven cabinet ministers are elected. A cabinet that ignores

the direction favoured by the majority soon runs into trouble.

I've discovered that many former British territories with large Indigenous populations use consensus government. Similar systems exist in the Pacific island nations of Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, as well as the ancient Tynwald of the Isle of Man.

But I've also learned that a democracy really needs political parties. Wipe from your mind for a moment your thoughts about current leaders or issues of the day, instead take a bird's eye view of what each political party stands for: Small government, individual responsibility, capitalism, soft nationalism, traditional values (Conservatives); big government, big labour, extensive social programming, high taxation, social justice (NDP); somewhere in the middle

of the previous two, edging more towards the NDP, but with a more globalism (Liberals); addressing the “climate emergency,” a green economy devoid of fossil fuels, social justice and a dash of globalism (Greens); and Quebec’s interests first and foremost (Bloc Québécois).  
Vive le Québec libre!

There are clear functions of each party and voters know what they are getting. In the non-party consensus system, as each candidate are “independents,” they all must promise everything to everyone. And in the end, nobody really gets anything.

Political parties are the bodies which gather views on various issues. They must put those through the policy grinders of each and present a platform for voters to judge.

Parties find candidates. They decide who is best for what region. They recruit women or minorities, ensuring their stable of candidates represent the party's ideals.

In short, parties simplify democracy.

Party identification is the best predictor of how your elected representative will vote. Being branded with a party stripe shows how they will push for update policies and new laws.

You know who the leader is. You know who will be prime minister or premier.

After all, following the last NWT territorial general election, did anyone expect Caroline Cochrane would be selected as our premier? Now nothing against the Range Lake MLA, it's clear she is passionate about her work and means

well, but she has been proving lately why many people were bewildered after the MLAs voted her in. I mean, it's fantastic the NWT has the only female premier and that she is Metis to boot! But we also need someone truly capable of leading us through what is proving to be the most challenging time in the territory's history. (Monfwi MLA and former speaker Jackson Lafferty was my choice.)



If there were political parties in the NWT, would Cochrane have been chosen as leader of one of them leading up to the 2019 election?

There are some in the territory's political arena who have been calling for the introduction of political parties. In fact, in March 2019 then-

Kam Lake MLA Kieron Testart was trying to organize some like-minded candidates run under the Liberal Democratic in the Oct. 1 territorial election.

“We believe that democracy is only as strong as its government institutions and that consensus model no longer ensures the representation of the interests of northerners,” stated a confidential draft document outlining the idea behind the party, which CBC North obtained at the time.

“I know there are some of my colleagues, in particular in the cabinet, who are very suspicious of this proposal and are very hostile to it,” he told CBC, angry that the document was leaked.

“You saw MLAs reject the idea of giving northerners an alternative. Now you see leaks, or removal of a document, for an idea that is unpopular with people in positions of power.”



By August, Testart, had dropped the idea, telling CBC he did find a group of people interested in the idea, and they had some great discussions. But he said people pushing the status quo worked against him. He was subsequently defeated on Oct. 1 by Kaitlin Cleveland, a GNWT policy analyst and owner of a small business.

NWT Chief Electoral Officer Nicole Latour told CBC the move to party politics is “a grey area” in the Elections Act. She pointed to Section 105 of the act which prohibits any candidate from signing a document that commits him or her to take certain actions if elected.

And just a few weeks ago, Latour spoke directly about electoral reform in her report on the 2019 Territorial General Election:

*“The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer continues to receive electors’ concerns around accountability in the consensus style government. Media coverage is consistent with the concerns brought by the electorate.*

*“Additionally, many express their desire to elect the premier independently as is done with mayor and council in communities. Achieving something of this nature would likely require convening a commission with the focus of electoral reform. However ensuring a higher level of accountability may be easier to achieve.*

*“Therefore, the final recommendation that stems from the delivery of the 2019 Territorial General Election is that Legislators should give some consideration to, through the Elections and Plebiscites Act, providing some form of answerability to electors. True accountability may be accomplished through providing the*

*ability for electors for an electoral district to recall their member of the Legislative Assembly for reasons such as absenteeism, inactivity or misrepresentation.”*

I praise Latour for speaking out on this issue. But will anyone listen? And why are people clinging to consensus government?

There has been very limited media coverage about her report at all. And what was covered didn't mention the most stunning recommendations in her report.

And last week, the Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures, chaired by Frame Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly, avoided those recommendations, while asking a lot of questions mostly on some very trivial aspects of Latour's report.



**James O'Connor**  
@james\_\_oconnor

And after almost two hours of some fairly pointless questions - underscored by audible yawns and even a dog barking in background - the [@AssemblyNWT](#) committee did not bring up the most contentious recommendation in the [@ElectionsNWT](#) report. [#GNWT](#)  
[#NWTpoli](#)



**James O'Connor** @james\_\_oconnor · Jun 10

Tonight at 7 pm @AssemblyNWT committee will review @ElectionsNWT 2019 election report. Dull? Not really. As on pg. 73 Nicole Latour says #NWT voters should elect premier during election - as done w/ mayors - and an MLA recall procedure is needed. #NWTpoli  
[electionsnwt.ca/sites/election...](https://electionsnwt.ca/sites/election...)

8:49 PM · Jun 10, 2020 · [TweetDeck](#)

While I'm looking at the CEO's report, I should note her office's work helped draw 531 more electors to the polls than the 2015 election in 2015, for a 10 per cent increase for a 54 per cent voter turnout.

Another significant first for the 2019 election — and a first for Canada — was the introduction of online balloting.

“Although only 3.7 per cent of electors who voted used the online ballot, the opportunity to engage with an online platform as a means to vote in an electoral event should likely remain a much needed solution and option for electors when delivering future electoral events in the Northwest Territories,” stated Latour in her report.

While we are leaders in some areas of governance, we still cling to a 20-year old experiment of consensus government that just isn't working.

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## **COP TALK**

Over time our society, we have developed a system to protect the good people from the bad

people. This thin blue line is all that keeps us from devolving into a chaotic existence with roaming gangs, warlords and everyone arming themselves with AK-47s to protect them and theirs.

Policing surely can't be an easy job. They are called into our lives at the worst moments. They must endure people who don't like them, don't want to see them and generally are scared of them.

In my reporting career, I've spent a lot of time in police stations in western Canada and also have been out on patrol with various municipal forces and the RCMP. There are good cops There are bad cops.



*Here I am during a break in a ride-along with Winnipeg police in the '90s. In years*

*past, police agencies were more open to allowing media to accompany them on patrol.*

I respect police and do enjoy knowing they will be there if I need them. But I admit I have white privilege. Of course, that's a thing. It has taken me a while to grasp the concept, but I'm an intelligent and curious human being. I am willing to educate myself and I am especially keen on learning about what the world looks like through other people's eyes.

I have no idea what it must be like to be in a situation where you don't trust police. Of course, I have been watching the events in the United States and also have seen recent videos of encounters in Canada between Indigenous people and the police that are quite troubling.

Are there racist cops with agendas? Yup. Should they be rooted out and fired? Of course.



Last week, the RCMP's commanding officer in the NWT admitted racism exists in his force.

“If we have racism in our society, then there's obviously going to be some that comes into our organization,” said Chief Supt. Jamie Zettler told media on Friday.

His comments echoed those of his boss, RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki who also said last week that she believes systemic racism exists in the Mounties' ranks.

# RCMP say systemic racism exists in force

Commissioner Lucki changes position from earlier statement to acknowledge structural discrimination in police

MARIEKE WALSH  
DANIEL LEBLANC OTTAWA  
CARRIE TAIT CALGARY

RCMP commanders across Canada went into damage control Friday, acknowledging that systemic racism persists in the national police force after spending the week denying that Indigenous and racial minorities suffer from unequal treatment at the hands of the Mounties.

What will be done about it though remains unclear as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau again declined Friday to detail specific policy measures that his government will implement to combat the discrimination and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said the Liberals are still in listening mode.

The NDP says the government has the answers it needs in the many reports available that detail the necessary changes. And party leader Jagmeet Singh said the lack of action, two weeks after the issue was propelled to the

national spotlight by a series of videos showing police use of force, is unacceptable.

On Wednesday, RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki told The Globe and Mail that "we don't have systemic racism" in the force. Late Friday, she released a statement acknowledging she was wrong.

"I did not say definitively that systemic racism exists in the RCMP. I should have," Commissioner Lucki said.

In the time between those comments, RCMP dash-cam video was made public showing a brutal takedown by two Mounties of Chief Allan Adam of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, a prominent Indigenous leader.

Part of the video shows an RCMP officer about to handcuff a visibly angry Mr. Adam, when another officer runs and forcefully throws him to the ground. The same officer can be seen punching Mr. Adam as the chief is heard yelling "what is it with you guys."

The video, made public late Thursday, had previously been reviewed by RCMP superior officers in Alberta and deemed a "reasonable" use of force. The violent arrest is now the subject of an independent investigation.

At the same time that Commissioner Lucki's statement was

released, Deputy Commissioner Curtis Zablocki, the Commanding Officer of the Alberta RCMP, stood in front of a microphone in Edmonton to walk back his own denial of systemic racism in the force, made Monday.

He said he came to realize that systemic racism persists in his force after spending the week speaking with Indigenous people, community members, other officers and Googling different terms.

"These have been conversations that challenged my perceptions and made it clear that systemic racism does exist in the RCMP," he told reporters.

He said he couldn't comment on the video of Mr. Adam's arrest because of the separate investigation.

In the Northwest Territories on Friday, the RCMP announced an investigation after APTN reported that an Indigenous man alleged he was beaten by police this week. The report included a picture of Benjamin Manuel with a boot mark on his face.

In Nunavut, a June video of a Mountie driving his car into an Inuit man is one of six active investigations into RCMP use of force in the territory, according to APTN.

Before her mea culpa, Mr. Trudeau said Commissioner Lucki would be able to tackle the struc-

tural discrimination in the institution because she wants to be "part of the solution."

During her two years leading the RCMP, Commissioner Lucki apologized for the force's treatment of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and received the national inquiry's final report, which detailed racism in the national police force and recommended many changes.

It is only now, though, that Commissioner Lucki has come to acknowledge the systemic racism in the Agency she presides over.

"Throughout our history and today, we have not always treated racialized and Indigenous people fairly," she said Friday.

Last year, The Globe and Mail reported that more than one third of the people shot and killed by the RCMP, between 2007 and 2017, were Indigenous.

But a complete understanding of police use of force, and who that force is most often used against, is not available in Canada. The RCMP does not collect race-based data as part of its use-of-force tracking and it does not make its use-of-force statistics public.

Mr. Trudeau wouldn't say Friday whether he will mandate the collection and publication of that data, which has most recently been called for in the na-

tional inquiry's report and by the United Nations.

Carl James, a professor of education and expert on racism at York University, said the fear around disaggregated data collection is that it can reinforce stereotypes. However, he said it can also be used to challenge the status quo and "as an advocacy tool by communities."

The need for the data was echoed by To Niemi with the Center for Research-Action on Race Relations in Montreal. He said the video of Mr. Adam's arrest also shows the need for more emphasis on de-escalation tactics, the focus for which is on the police.

Mr. Trudeau has repeatedly promised to do more. But other than stating his support for body cameras, with no budget or timeline for implementation, the Prime Minister has made no specific commitments.

Among the changes the government could make right now, according to Mr. Singh, are a ban on racial profiling by federal agencies, the collection of disaggregated police data, and new policies around use-of-force and de-escalation.

"It's hypocritical that the Prime Minister would take a knee and make a symbolic gesture ... but then take no action," Mr. Singh said.

## Nothing to see? We've now seen it — and the RCMP owe Canadians an explanation

CAMPBELL  
CLARK  
OPINION



The first word from the RCMP about the arrest of Chief Allan Adam was of the nothing-to-see-here variety.

So when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called for an independent investigation, he should have made it clear that a big part of the inquiry must be about what happened later: the decision that this case needed no external review, and the RCMP statement to the public that the use of force was reasonable.

More than that: Mr. Trudeau should be demanding that the RCMP explain that. Or retract it. So should Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, whose government is responsible for policing.

Mr. Trudeau reiterated that he believes there's systemic racism in Canada, including in the RCMP, and that there's work to do to change it. And then RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki, and the deputy commissioner for Alberta, Curtis Zablocki, who had both previously been unwilling to clearly acknowledge that systemic racism in the force exists, publicly backtracked to acknowledge that it does.

In the case of Mr. Adam's arrest, the Prime Minister called for an independent investigation to provide "answers" — but he should also be calling for explanation of what happened after that night. Here was a specific case of the system failing.

Whatever an investigation finds, this was a case that called out for a review that might not have happened.

By themselves, the arrest of Mr. Adam, Chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, and the RCMP officer's use of force, require investigation.

But now that the public has seen a 12-minute dash-cam video, it's the RCMP's initial response — which told the public that the use of force was "reasonable" — that poses more questions.

When Mr. Adam's allegation that he was beaten by police was first brought forward in The Globe and Mail last Friday, the Alberta RCMP's media-relations manager, Fraser Logan, said that the incident had been caught by an in-car video system — the video itself had not been released at that time — and "it was determined that the member's actions were reasonable."

The video starts with the RCMP cruiser parked behind Mr. Adam's pickup truck. The chief can be heard complaining that the po-



Police in Fort McMurray, Alta., arrest Allan Adam, Chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, in this video still from an RCMP cruiser's dash cam taken on March 10. RCMP/ASA REUTERS

lice are harassing him. He sweats angrily several times, at one point moving toward the officer, and at another assuming what looks like a fighting stance, before his wife calms him down. At another point, the officer grabbed his wife, Freda Courtoiselle, and Mr. Adam jumps out of the truck yelling at the officer to "leave my wife alone."

After about seven minutes with Mr. Adam and his wife interacting with just one officer, a siren is heard, a car door slams, and another officer suddenly rushes

through the frame, tackling Mr. Adam head-high, bringing him to the ground, punching him.

It's at that point that the idea of "reasonable" seems out of place. The second officer never spoke to Mr. Adam before he charged; he had literally just arrived when he was charging. He could not have assessed what was reasonable. It's hard to guess how his superiors decided that his actions were reasonable.

But even if they did, it seems someone at Wood Buffalo RCMP should have sent that video to

higher-ups at Alberta's "K" division to take another look. Did they? That's something that needs explanation, in public. That determination, by itself, might have stopped any review.

There are circumstances when an external review is automatic under Alberta law, such as when the use of force by the police causes serious injury or death, but that bar wasn't met in this case. When unidentified RCMP superiors decided that the video showed nothing awry, the scrutiny might have ended there. It was only after Mr. Adam complained that the provincial government asked the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team to investigate.

Deputy Commissioner Zablocki wasn't talking Friday about how it was determined that the actions on the video were reasonable. Reporters asked and he said he couldn't comment because of the ASIRT investigation.

Not good enough. The RCMP doesn't need to wait to explain their standard for reasonable — and just what kind of review such a case merits. They don't have to interfere in an investigation into the events of March 10 in order to be forthright about what happened afterward. We were told that there was nothing to see here, and there was.

“I do know that systemic racism is part of every institution, the RCMP included. Throughout our history and today, we have not always treated racialized and Indigenous people fairly, said Lucki, adding she has a responsibility to ensure the force is “free of racism, discrimination and bias.”

Those candid admissions were a refreshing change from the head in the sand comments we’ve become used to over the years by top cops and many politicians. Now let’s see if they result in any action.

Is there a different way to protect good people from bad people other than having an armed police force? Show me and I’ll have a look. If the argument is the justice system is inherently racist as it was set up by white English and French colonists a long time ago — something that has a ring of truth to it, witness the

introduction of the Gladue sentencing principle in the '90s — then what would public safety look like if we wiped the slate clean now and started over?

I do think more resources need to be given to social services (mental health, addictions and domestic violence experts), but not at the expense of reducing budgets of existing police agencies. If anything, police need more money for training and ongoing evaluations of their performance. All police need to be wearing body cameras. That's just a no-brainer.

There is already video covering a lot of the actions of police. And it does help deciding who did what and why. Video is extremely important.

I bring this up as there was a case in NWT Territorial Court a short while ago that went by

without much coverage from the media at the time, save for my story for Cabin Radio.

A Fort McPherson man left with bruising after being repeatedly punched in the face was found not guilty of assaulting the RCMP officer who was hitting him.



*Travis Jerome in photo from his Facebook page with a caption he added.*

Yeah, the justice system actually charged Travis Jerome of assaulting a cop after Const. Scott Brian Thomas used “pain-control” techniques

against him during a struggle while he was in custody.

Chief Judge Robert Gorin clearly wasn't buying the police version of events, finding in his March 23 decision that Jerome could have been acting in self-defence. It was a shocking statement by a judge. And a real condemnation of what police did on that occasion.

*“I found that based on the evidence there existed a realistic possibility that Officer Thomas was applying excessive force to Mr Jerome immediately prior to the minor motion I observed.*

*“I found additionally that the Crown had failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Mr Jerome was not acting in self-defence when he made that motion.*

*“Based on all of the evidence presented in this case, I was and remain far from being sure that Mr Jerome punched or attempted to punch Constable Thomas.”*

The altercation between Jerome and Thomas occurred at the police detachment in Fort McPherson on Oct. 25, 2019.

Thomas and his partner, Const. Jenna Moore, had just arrested Jerome after responding to an early morning call about a domestic dispute between Jerome and his girlfriend.

While being transported to the detachment, an apparently intoxicated Jerome became “angry and belligerent” in the patrol vehicle, stated Gorin, noting the situation escalated once inside the detachment.



A struggle ensued. The entire incident had been recorded on video, which I haven't seen.

Const. Thomas disputed what could be seen of Jerome punching him in the video recording.

Gorin, in his decision, stated:

*“With respect, the video was quite clear. I saw no punch or blow, I saw nothing that looked like anything other than a very minor movement of Mr Jerome’s right arm.*

*“There appeared to be no real force behind the movement that I observed. If anything, this movement was more consistent with an attempt to keep Constable Thomas away from him than the alleged punch or swing.*

*“I then saw Constable Thomas punch Mr Jerome a number of times in the face and when Mr Jerome attempted to crawl away, continue to strike him from behind on the back of the head. On each occasion, the officer struck him with considerable force.”*

Jerome had pleaded not guilty to assaulting a peace officer, resisting arrest, and breach of probation. Gorin found him not guilty of all charges.

So, what do you make of what you read? Depending on your upbringing, your background, you will interpret those facts differently. Should Jerome have accepted the fact he was being arrested and gone along quietly? Should the cops have been so aggressive in responding to their prisoner's belligerence? Should the entire situation occurred in the first place? What was behind the

domestic dispute? Was the woman in danger? What history did Jerome have with police in general and those cops in particular in that small community? Should the officer himself have been charged? Did he ever face internal discipline?

I couldn't find any information online about Const. Thomas, but his partner that night Const. Moore has been in the media quite a bit — for all the right reasons.

“You can be anything you want to be,” she is quoted as saying in a [CBC North story](#) in 2018 to a grade 8 student at Inuvik's East Three School.

And in the September 2018 [edition](#) of the RCMP Gazette, Const. Stephanie Leduc explained how

she and Const. Moore taught a class every week in the high school:

“Prior to our involvement in the school, we rarely had students speak to us during shift. Once the school year ended, we found that many of the students were now waving to us, inviting us to play sports and coming to us with information about crime.

One student told me that she never liked the police before but she now thinks the police are pretty cool. I see it as a success, but one that is pretty difficult to capture through quantitative statistics.”

In July 2019, Moore and Leduc allowed youth to redecorate a patrol vehicle. The campaign, entitled Chill with the Cops, saw police work with the town’s youth centre. Children were

provided with washable paint to rebrand the truck however they liked.

So on one night, Moore is struggling to restrain a prisoner with her partner, who appears to have been overly aggressive.

But on other occasions she has been working her butt off to reach out to the community to better relations and improve trust.

There are no simple answers to what is a very complicated situation between police and society.

There are no simple answers. Life isn't simple.

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**JUSTICE REFORM IN YELLOWKNIFE**

The folks at Yellowknife Public Library have determined overdue book fines go against the Canadian Federation of Library Associations' Code of Ethics and should be dropped.

In a presentation to city council last week, the library explained late fees exclude the socially disadvantaged, as they unfairly punishes those with less income

*“Coming to the realization that late fees create a barrier to access for economically challenged individuals, many of the last remaining public libraries across North America are finally eradicating late fines.*

*“There is very little evidence to suggest that late fines make people return items on time and those libraries that have already gone fine-free have reported that they have not found a significant change in late returns.”*

The current fines for overdue books are 10 cents a day, to a maximum of \$5. And those fines account for “a very minimal percentage,” of the operating budget of the facility, located on the second floor of the Centre Square Mall.

However, the late-book baddies won't be completely off the hook, as they won't be able to borrow anything else from the collection of 70,000 items — including print, audiobooks, e-Books, music CDs, and DVDs — unless overdue materials are returned. And after a certain amount of time, states the library, overdue materials get classified as lost and replacement costs are still charged.

But hey, at least we have a small step in overhauling the justice system to address systemic unfairness.

Posted on

June 15, 2020

Tags

[Election](#), [GNWT](#), [Government](#), [Racism](#), [RCMP](#) [Edit](#)

**The city now has a  
wet shelter with a  
managed alcohol  
program**





*Clients in the 30-day managed alcohol program at the Sobering Centre/Day Shelter on 50 Street during a supervised smoke break last week.*

**“With controlled distribution of alcohol and no access to illegal drugs, the people we support are telling us how they feel healthier than they have in years.”**

*— Alannis McKee, of the NWT Disabilities Council, to NNSL*

Providing alcohol to alcoholics may seem counter-intuitive. However, harm-reduction is a longstanding tool to help combat addictions — consider methadone maintenance programs, safe injection sites and needle exchanges.

Prodded by some advocates, the GNWT has long been toying with the idea of setting up a managed alcohol program in the city. But until now, it either hasn't had the opportunity, the location, or the political fortitude to institute such a controversial program.

The positive effects of wet shelters for the community as a whole and on the chronically homeless lifetime alcoholics in the program include:

- lower levels of consumption (and safer, as opposed to non-beverage alcohol such as mouthwash);
- fewer run-ins with the law and a lower number of trips to the emergency room;
- higher levels of happiness and quality of life as they no longer worry about where the next drink will come from;
- fewer instances of violence;
- improved sleep and healthier weight;
- other health concerns being addressed; and
- it can be a first step for many to join longer-term recovery programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

In 2016, a Yellowknife emergency room doctor told CBC when the alcoholism is essentially “under control,” physicians can begin to look at the patient’s other health issues.

“For some reason we always insist that addiction has to be the first thing, and sometimes the only thing, that we manage before we can get to the mental health issues, before we can get to the physical issues,” said David Pontin, who had worked in Vancouver’s notorious Downtown Eastside. “Managed alcohol programs, what I think their strength is, is that they say, ‘Hey listen, we see where you are with your alcohol use, we understand this is a dangerous addiction, but we’ll put that aside for now. We’ll help you with that part of your addiction when the time comes, but let’s get you housed, let’s deal with your psychiatric issues, your depression, your anxiety.’”

“I think that is a very sane and very compassionate approach to alcohol problems.”

The Report on Homelessness Working Group October 2016 stated: “There is considerable

evidence that harm reduction programs can have positive health effects for individuals suffering from severe addiction issues. In Yellowknife's context, the primary addiction of the homeless population is alcohol, creating violent behaviour and many health-related issues that put the homeless at significant risk. The Working Group is recommending the establishment of a harm reduction pilot project ... specifically, a managed alcohol program. The Working Group strongly believes that the GNWT's Department of Health and Social Services should undertake an assessment on what a managed alcohol program would look like in Yellowknife, and consider launching a pilot project.”

In October 2016, then health minister Glen Abernethy said he's prepared to consider managed alcohol programs, with sobering centre — then two years away from opening — where a managed alcohol program would fit best.

He was backed by several city MLAs, including Yellowknife Centre's MLA Julie Green.

There have also been continued calls for an addictions rehab centre in the NWT, instead of continually shipping those seeking recovery down south.

So, under the cover of COVID-19 — where government has taken over every aspect of our lives — a 30-day managed alcohol program test-run has been set up, creating a situation that looks remarkably like a rehab centre.

The Day Shelter/Sobering Centre on 50 Street was announced at the start of April to be home to 30 homeless adults. And I say that's a good plan. But it wasn't perfectly executed, as advocates who normally would have supported such a move are now decrying it, as it has left a handful of homeless people with a patchwork of supports.

Facility operator NWT Disabilities Council originally stated the 30 people had agreed to not leave the site and that the building will be closed to anyone else. The stated reason was to “ensure that they are not exposed” to COVID-19. The council did not state it would be providing alcohol to its clients.

That was only revealed, in passing, in an April 7 CBC North story on the backlash to the closing of the centre from those homeless people who now find themselves with fewer options for shelter. Other media have now reported about it, without much background.

The Salvation Army and Yellowknife Women’s Society — and the RCMP, with its drunk tank — is attempting to fill the gap in services.

But that patchwork of services was exactly why the Day Shelter/Sobering Centre was set up in the first place in 2018.

The actual number of people above the 30 being sheltered in the managed alcohol program who are homeless and in need of help on a daily basis isn't really known. One 2018 count indicated there were 338 homeless people in the city. But It's unclear how "homeless" those people are — as opposed to those couch-surfing or otherwise in unstable situations — and if that number has changed. There certainly aren't hundreds of people wandering the streets at this time.

It's clear by just driving around downtown that there are far fewer folks hanging out and drinking or panhandling. But there still are a few regulars, asking for change in front of the remaining open businesses.



Of course, the fact the GNWT is releasing some prisoners early over concerns that COVID-19 might enter the North Slave Correctional Complex won't help — I note flights to many smaller communities have been cut off — unless there are guarantees they have homes to be released to. But I digress.

Having 30 homeless people off the streets is in itself a positive step for the city. And we could enjoy the hassle-free strolls through downtown if we all weren't sheltering in place over the potential for spread of the coronavirus.

Booze abuse has become a hot target for community leaders across the NWT during the novel coronavirus threat — with some calling for outright bans on sales.

On April 4, the Dene Nation called for immediate restrictions to liquor and cannabis availability.

Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya said 28 chiefs across the North voted unanimously in support of a motion calling on Premier Caroline Cochrane to immediately create a working group to tackle the issue. It would draft plans to restrict liquor consumption as well as limiting store hours.

The GNWT has kept its six liquor stores open throughout the pandemic to date, but with reduced hours and incorporating physical distancing measures. This week, Finance Minister Caroline Wawzonek said she would not be further restricting liquor sales. Good. This is not the time to restrict the little bit of fun — and emotional relief — alcohol and weed offer to those who use the substances properly.

Yakeleya, himself a self-admitted recovering alcoholic, is trying himself to use COVID-19 as a cover for some social engineering he and other Indigenous leaders should have been doing all along.

“We are looking at unique programs ... treatment programs on the land,” Yakeleya said in a telephone news conference one week ago. “It’s new, it’s unprecedented. We are not asking for structured buildings, we have our counsellors already in the community. They are the Elders, grandmothers and grandfathers, and medicine people, spiritual people. We have them waiting to ask for help.”

“We cannot wait until Sunday or Monday, we have to do it now. We’ve got to know that this is how serious it is and that the chiefs ... the voice of the Dene have spoken.”

But why all this focus on booze now?

Alcoholism has been a scourge across the territory for decades. It is at the root of almost all crime, almost all domestic breakdown and almost all unemployment.

Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh MLA Steve Norn said in a Facebook post residents were still “not getting the message” about COVID-19. “I am going to be lobbying very hard to see that there are liquor restrictions.”

But are house parties during the lockdown really the problem?

At the time of this writing, there is still no community spread of the virus. And it doesn't appear magically under the melting snow.

Now I have no problem with leaders doing what they can to direct their people to healthier lifestyles. I just think it's a bit sneaky to do it under the guise of protecting us from COVID-19 and to call on a prohibition-style liquor sales ban that would make everyone suffer.

I was pleased to hear Finance Minister Caroline Wawzonek telling Cabin Radio there could be no “one size fits all” solution for the territory.

“I think there are ways individual communities can have restrictions put in place. Every individual liquor store can have different restrictions in place, it doesn't have to be a territory-wide solution,” said Wawzonek.

“That is where I think I'm going to have to go with this, because there's such a concern within the health profession, within the health bodies,

that we not risk taxing them if people wind up in a detox situation.”

Hence, the wet shelter experiment for homeless and severely alcoholic people.

In other jurisdictions that have tried a managed alcohol program in wet shelters, it was found to be a good step into abstinence programs.

Attempting to quit drinking is a big challenge for many — especially for those with lengthy addictions. But a wet shelter allows people to stabilize their consumption, while also receiving proper nutrition and health care as needed. Stabilization means that the homeless alcoholics are going “cold turkey,” but rather can adjust to lowered levels of consumption without suffering withdrawal and seizures.

I hope this experiment at the downtown Day Shelter/Sobering Centre continues past its initial 30-day term. That fact the ne'er-do-wells that have wreaked havoc around the centre since it opened are no longer hanging in and around the place is a godsend for business owners and residents in the area.

With the Arnica Inn now to come online as transitional housing, this is an opportunity for the GNWT to finally move in a positive way in dealing with the homeless and addictions. We can have a wet shelter acting as a first step towards recovery, the problems with the Day Shelter/Sobering Centre solved, and people who are publicly intoxicated taken to the drunk tank where they belong.

Yes, there will be some issues until the Arnica Inn is ready, but the Salvation Army and other existing shelters can step up with help from the

city and territory. The GNWT also looking at turning Aspen Apartments into temporary housing for people to self-isolate in.

We need to see what effect the 30-day isolation had on the people in the shelter. The big question will be if there are proper supports in place for those who are ready to try a new, sober life. And since this COVID-19 scare will still be here in May, will there be another intake of 30 people for 30 days?

Posted on

April 11, 2020

Tags

Alcoholism, Downtown, Homelessness Edit



# **NOTES/QUOTES**

**#14: A spit-take in Inuvik; tough times for 12-steppers; and NNSL apologizes for columnist**



*The main drag in Inuvik, in front of the Mad Trapper bar. Ignoring that No*

*Loitering sign will now cost folks \$75 under new bylaws.*

A spit-take is a comic technique you'll see when a person spits out a drink — or food — in reaction to something funny or shocking.

But the nonchalant expulsion of that thick viscous substance as one walks down the street is not funny at all.

When I had a storefront photo studio in downtown Winnipeg, the large glass windows on one side were right at a major city bus transfer stop.

It was then I first noticed how often people would spit on the ground. I had never really paid much attention to people's phlegm habits before. But once it caught my attention, I could not avert my gaze any longer.

It was shocking. Disgusting and shocking.

I can't recall ever needing to spit much. Oh sure, I've tossed the contents of my stomach in a few bushes at music festivals, but walking down the street, my bodily fluids generally stay inside my person.

So it was interesting to hear that Inuvik bylaw officers and RCMP can now fine people for spitting, loitering, pooping and peeing in public under a new bylaw passed unanimously at a town council meeting in late February.

Yup, here's the menu of what it will cost folks if they choose to do the following: Fighting \$250; urination/defecation \$150; spitting \$50; loitering \$75; littering \$500; or failing to remove litter \$500.

“I see no problem passing such a bylaw as this,” Inuvik Deputy Mayor Steven Baryluk told the Inuvik Drum newspaper. “In my mind it’s setting minimal acceptable standards of public behaviour. It is not out to target any one group, it applies to everybody.

“I don’t think anyone in this town or any other town would agree that defecating in the streets is acceptable and right now we don’t really have a way to deal with that.”

However, I’m pretty sure it’s not the tourists who are visiting the Beaufort Delta just to spit on the place.

It’s clear the street people, the public boozers and the homeless are the ones being targeted with this new law. So it’s also pretty clear it simply won’t work. If you have no money, the prospect of being fined isn’t a deterrent.

But town officials seem to understand that. Officials told the *Inuvik Drum* that once a ticketed individual is in the court system, they could have the potential to complete an alternate measures program.

The *Drum* interviewed Yellowknife outreach worker — and my fellow Rotarian — Lydia Bardak (spelling her name wrong in the story, but hey...).

“There’s going to be a cost associated with it,” she told the *Drum*. “Bylaw officers will have to be in court for bylaw court so they won’t be out there doing bylaw stuff.”

The only possible advantage is the town could end up with some free labour from folks needing to work off fines they couldn’t pay in court.

And those convicted public poopers could then be forced to clean up after others.

Ahh, the circle of life.

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## **COVID-19 AND RECOVERY**

For people who had trouble coping with the way society was structured in the pre-COVID era, this new government-imposed lifestyle of nothingness will allow recovering addicts to thrive or fail.

People trying to stay sober or away from illegal drugs face daily challenges. A stable routine, proper nutrition and reliable support systems that are readily accessible are so incredibly important for alcoholics and addicts.

If folks in 12-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) are following the Big Book and have good sponsors, then the lack of distractions — such as healthy recreation options, churches and booze-free entertainment venues — shouldn't force them into the “stinking thinking” that leads to a slip.

However, as AA club meetings are cancelled and for an alcoholic or addict who was just casually sniffing around the edges of recovery, this extended period of being inside with others or — for some, even worse, being alone with their thoughts — could lead to a relapse.

For people with court orders not to drink or drug, that could mean a violation of probation and a trip back into court.



Or worse, if a relapse is severe enough, it could lead to violent events with others or, tragically, suicide.

People who aren't in recovery but should be will now face increased stress, financial hardship, high anxiety, loneliness and despair. Those are fertile grounds for substance abuse and addiction to thrive.

These are the things that have to be weighed by the government when a decision was made to shut down the city and territory out of fear of spreading the China-originated novel coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 respiratory disease.

While we will be preventing the spread of COVID-19, there will be collateral damage. Those in recovery are one segment of society at particular risk.

The group therapy found in AA club meetings is indispensable.

There are online meetings, but that won't help everyone and will not make up for the human touch of a handshake at a meeting. And being able to tell your stories of the past and how you're faring in recovery are very important. People with unstable living situations might not have the freedom to speak freely in their homes, even if they have internet access.

A group in Winnipeg I was familiar with in the 1990s used to hold hands and stand in a circle at the end of each meeting while reciting The Lord's Prayer. It was powerful.

A shared trait among most alcoholics or addicts is that they filled the space between the people they pushed away in their lives with booze and drugs. Now they are being asked to stay inside,

perhaps alone, without grabbing for the nearest bottle or calling the local drug dealer.

Addicts are afraid to look inside themselves. Now they are being forced to do so without the usual supports.

They need to be strong and stay strong. Read the Big Book. Pray. Have a full faith in their Higher Power.

A once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic? This too, shall pass.

I have an app on my phone from Hazelden — find it at the Apple app store — that offers daily recovery thoughts. No, I am not in recovery myself. But I have a deep appreciation for the positive impact AA can have on people's shattered lives.

*A recent Hazelden thought for the day:*

“When we were drinking, we used to be ashamed of the past. Remorse is terrible mental punishment: ashamed of ourselves for the things we’ve said and done, afraid to face people because of what they might think of us, afraid of the consequences of what we did when we were drunk. In AA we forget about the past. Do I believe that God has forgiven me for everything I’ve done in the past, no matter how black it was, provided I’m honestly trying to do the right thing today?”

*Meditation for the day:*

“God’s spirit is all about you all day long. You have no thoughts, no plans, no impulses, no emotions that He does not know about. You can hide nothing from Him. Do not make your conduct conform only to that of the world and do

not depend on the approval or disapproval of others. God sees in secret, but He rewards openly. If you are in harmony with the Divine Spirit, doing your best to live the way you believe God wants you to live, you will be at peace.

*Prayer for the day:*

I pray that I may always feel God's presence. I pray that I may realize this Presence constantly all through the day.

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Just a quick note on calls for extreme restrictions on the sale of liquor and cannabis at the territory's licensed outlets. This is a dangerous move that needs to be well thought out.

Closing down all liquor stores in response to the virus is an act which runs the risk of sending people with alcohol use disorder into withdrawal. Delirium tremens can occur, resulting in shaking, irregular heartbeat, high body temperature — and death.

It will also lead to increased bootlegging and the use of other non-potable substances — such as solvents — as desperate people turn to desperate measures.

Also, cannabis is a calming drug that is something certainly needed right now.

I'll explore this further in the coming days.

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**DEFENDING THE INDEFENSIBLE**

In my last blog, I commented on the failings of Northern News Services columnist Nancy Vail.

The dyed-in-the-wool social justice warrior's weekly pieces in the *Yellowknifer* have been a cesspool of leftist rants, ill-informed attacks on government policies and downright wrong information.

## **NOTES** from the trail

**Nancy Vail**

*is a longtime Yellowknifer  
concerned with social justice*



It's so bad that NNSL publisher Bruce Valpy was forced to write a column of his own apologizing for, and correcting the content of, a

recent column by Vail. On March 31, Vail went after the GNWT for “shaming” publicity hound Mike “Pike” Harrison — a character on the reality show Ice Lake Rebels — who boasted how he ignored directives by the chief public health officer when he returned to the NWT and did not self-isolate in Hay River as instructed, but continued to his homestead north of Fort Liard.

In the same piece, she also attacked the mining industry and how “we caused this pandemic by the unsustainable way we live, making a healthy economy more important than healthy people.”

In his April 3 column entitled “Setting the record straight on the ‘Pike’ Mike Covid predicament story,” Valpy admitted Vail got things wrong.



However, instead of tubing her column, Valpy chose to praise her.

“Nancy Vail is a valuable contributor to NNSL,” he wrote. “She and we are all writing on the fly doing our best for our readers.”

Unless NNSL simply can't find anyone these days willing to write for it, there is no reason for Valpy to cling on to Vail in such a fashion. NNSL already has a host of left-leaning contributors, so losing one wouldn't even come close to balancing the ideological scales.

And “writing on the fly” is what reporters do on a daily basis. You need to be fast and accurate. If not, you don't belong in the biz.

Including Vail in that skills group is rather odd. She clearly is an opinion writer who is fast and free with the truth.

As a freelance columnist, she has the time to do the research to get her stories straight, if that's what she really wants to do. For a columnist to earn any respect, they must base their arguments on solid facts.

The public needs to be able to trust what a media outlet is putting out there. Does Valpy's handling of the Vail matter increase or decrease the level of trust you have in what NNSL is doing as a media outlet?

Posted on

April 5, 2020

Tags

COVID-19, Inuvik, Journalism, Recovery Edit

# I don't want to be 60. Or maybe I do?



*Me at 16 in Montreal. My favourite cake was always chocolate, with coffee icing.*

I am 60 years old today.

Sheesh.

It's just a number, sure. But it is a milestone.

I used to celebrate my birthdays partying like a viking. It wasn't a birthDAY, it was a birthWEEK. It wasn't as if I was excited about getting older. I just enjoyed living a rock 'n' roll lifestyle.

I was a news photographer back in the day when newspapers were the prime source of real news. I was a nightclub reporter — yes, it was part of my dream job as an entertainment reporter — at a time when hair was big, morals were small and there was no thought of the future.

I was a political operative — and married for the first time — so my birthday bashes were tempered somewhat.



*My two years in politics ended with the defeat in 1999 of Premier Gary Filmon and his Progressive Conservative government. The day after the election, I was in the legislative building to clean out my desk — I had been one of his press secretaries — when the premier called me into his office to thank me and give me a letter of recommendation.*

I was a newspaper editor when I entered the first phase of an extended post-divorce mid-life crisis, so my annual spree of jubilation marking my entry into the world was still quite strong.

Then came my 50s. And I started to calm down. My body decided it had had enough and started to throw a few challenges at me.

So here I am. Happily enjoying my self-imposed exile from the temptation of debauchery in the south.

I not only moved to Yellowknife for work, but also as a geographic cure to throw a wrench into the mental machinery that had driven me for so many years. It had worked for me for many

years, but it was dangerous on many levels, so I wanted a change. And I got it.

Everything happens for a reason.

That's why I'm here. That's why I'm writing this.

Getting older forces one to examine one's lot in life.

What have I done? Have I done enough? What is left for me to do?

Well, I have done plenty. I have lived more life than many folks could even imagine.

I've been very bad. But also very good. I've lived in Montreal, Toronto, Brandon, Winnipeg and now, Yellowknife. That's a pretty good

swath of this country. I have no interest in living abroad.

I was a rotten only child. My 20s and 30s were exercises in excessive narcissism. I started to change in my 40s and 50s, when I realized that giving back to the community felt good. I joined Rotary. I volunteered for community groups and donated to causes when I could.





*In my ultra-artsy period when I thought I was going to be a film editor.*

Professionally, I have supported myself through photography and reporting — something I never thought possible when I was studying filmmaking at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto in the '80s. I was going to be a film editor. Then God laughed and sent me from downtown Toronto to the wheat fields of Western Manitoba to be a newspaper photographer.

The most transformative period of my personal and professional life was being hired by The Winnipeg Sun to be an entertainment writer after I had started to write about the music scene in Brandon in my spare time from being a photographer. That was back in the day when reporters were reporters and photographers were photographers and being “two-way” was rare in the profession.

The music editor at the Sun, John Kendle, ended up being my mentor, my best friend and even my best man at my first wedding. We partied hardy. And worked harder. We were tabloid people working at a snarky paper up against the grey old Winnipeg Free Press. And we punched above our weight.

We drank hard and hung out with musicians, gangsters, drug-dealers and rock stars. I recall being in Guns N' Roses hotel suite after a concert in Winnipeg. Axl was previewing a new video and telling everyone to shut up, especially one of my well-refreshed buddies (hello, Shaky!). Slash pushed me into a room with his latest groupie who he had brought from Toronto. She wanted to smoke some hash, he wasn't in the mood.

The sun came up, I had a parking ticket and was late for work. Was suspended for that.



*A couple of my buddies from the day. I was photographing the Winnipeg Blue Bombers on the sidelines and heard them yelling at me from the stands. That's Doug on the left, who worked the door at my favourite live-music hangout, The Zoo. That's Shaky on the right. A heavy metal guitar player who had a band called Lawsuit.*

I was hired by local promoters to document Paul McCartney's concert in Winnipeg and spent the day backstage with them and the whole crew. His wife Linda handed me her Nikon to take a

photo of her and a group of Girl Guides visiting backstage. A priceless moment.

But throughout my life, I've been hounded by fear. Now that can be a good thing. That if fear drives action instead of deferral and despondency. And it generally has been a motivator for me. It drove me to partner in a studio in downtown Winnipeg when I ran my first commercial photo biz (hello, Jodee!). It drove me to complete two fine art projects and stage my own public exhibition. It drove me to mentor young photographers and help aspiring reporters.

I have written literally hundreds of opinion columns in my time as a newsroom editor. Putting my views out there and then being prepared for the feedback — good, bad, or brutal — isn't something for the faint of heart. But I

did it. And do so to this day in the form of this blog.

However, fear also drove me to distraction at times.

As a creative person who has largely relied on my artistic abilities to survive, I have always wondered if I was really any good. I was/am in fear that it will be discovered that I truly suck at being a photographer, a writer and editor. That I am phony in my desires to now be a positive contributing member of society.

We all have certain levels of fear. I believe that.

But when does it become debilitating?

When does fear morph into anxiety and depression?

It's a struggle, at times.

That's part of the reason I chose never to have children. I don't think I would be a good parent. I'm amazed at how some of my friends have become very good parents (hello, Melissa!).

That's part of the reason I have been divorced twice. I tried marriage as I thought it was something I should do. I have never experienced a fairy tale romance or fallen madly in love.

It's just the way I'm wired. I know that now.

I also struggled through various strengths of addiction for several years. Clearly, if you have read so far, you'll understand I was mostly searching for a career that would support my lifestyle.





*This is me in the middle of photographing a wedding in Winnipeg. It was after I went through a marriage and a bit of lifestyle retooling. My assistant who took this photo was also being mentored by me. She went on to open her own wedding photography business.*

But that was then. I sought help when I needed it — or when my back was against the wall — and consider the lessons learned in the various support group clubrooms some of the most valuable guidance I have ever received.

In recent years, I haven't really drank very much booze. I can't recall the last time I was drunk. It just doesn't interest me. So I'm one of the lucky ones. I've seen a lot of friends not be able to kick bad habits. And they've either died, or their lives have been wrecked on the shoals of over indulgence.

So here I am. At 60.

I'm a survivor, but I'm also still looking for challenges.

I am fortunate enough that my parents were frugal and managed to live through an era when investments could be very lucrative over time. We were a middle-class family. My father was in the army and my mother looked after me and the household.

My parents were older than those of my friends. My mom and dad couldn't have kids of their own and adopted me when I was three months old from an alcoholic wretch in New Brunswick. I say that because I met my birth mother later in life and she was truly a mess. But she loved me and I kept in touch with her, right until her death in her early-70s a few years ago.

My adoptive parents are now also both dead. And I am able to live in semi-retirement as a

result of the inheritance they left me. I am blessed for that. While I am not wealthy, I can live comfortably and take on freelance work that appeals to me.

I also have some time to help out community groups and organizations.

So here I am at 60.

Living with two cats I adopted from a rescue service in Brandon in a nice apartment overlooking Yellowknife Bay. I have a girlfriend who works in local media and we enjoy hanging out together. We just can't discuss politics. Nope, never discuss politics.

I'm comfortable knowing I'm just where I need to be at the time I need to be here. Happy birthday to me. I've made it to 60.

Posted on

March 22, 2020

Tags

Birthday Edit

# The mind rot of racism

I have no idea what it would be like to be a visible minority and be the subject of a racial slur.

Being part of the settler-colonizer class who lived in southern Canada most of my life, I've likely been part of the problem, rather than the

solution. Until I moved to Yellowknife, I was largely ignorant of the effects my ancestors had on the Indigenous people in Canada.

But I've been learning about it. And my eyes have been opened.

Covering courts each week for Cabin Radio, I get first-hand lessons on the lasting legacy of residential schools. The broken families, violence and substance abuse has resulted in large numbers of Indigenous people who grew up in dysfunctional situations — alcohol and drug abuse, physical and sexual abuse and little or no secondary schooling — and they land in front of a judge.

Then there are the incidents of racism. There was one in the news last week about a young Indigenous athlete from Aklavik — a community of 600 on the west side of the

Mackenzie Delta — is speaking out after racist language was hurled at her at a hockey game.



*Davina McLeod, of Aklavik, who plays hockey for her school in Alberta. Photo from Facebook*

CBC North reported that Davina McLeod, who plays hockey with the Trojans at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, says on Feb. 8, her team played the Red Deer Queens and she got into a skirmish on the ice with a rookie player from the other team.

During a skirmish she said an opposing player called her a “dirty fucking Indian.” (CBC didn’t spell out the profanity.)

Said McLeod: “It just reiterates that we’re not really welcomed as a part of Canada. We’re not respected,” said McLeod. “The way she said it to me was supposed to make me feel inferior to her, which I really didn’t like because I’m so proud of where I come from.”

McLeod’s family belongs to both the Inuvialuit and Gwich’in Nations of the western Arctic.

The other player later apologized, which is the right thing to do.

However, the correct thing would have been never to have said it in the first place.

The incident was brought up in the NWT Legislative Assembly on Friday.

The words spoken by Kam Lake MLA Caitlin Cleveland really moved me. She not only situated the matter effectively, but offered methods to combat racism.





*Kam Lake MLA Caitlin Cleveland. Photo NWT Legislative Assembly*

As soon as Cleveland was finished, I decided I would reprint her statement in my blog, with the hope more people would take into their hearts what she said.

So, from Hansard, here is Cleveland's member's statement (she also referred to an incident in a local school last week, which I hadn't heard about):

“Mr. Speaker, as I climbed into bed late last night I had a much different statement planned for today. One last check of social media led me a story of racism that occurred in one of our schools yesterday.

“Earlier this week, we heard of racial slurs directed at an NWT student during a SALT hockey game in Calgary. In both instances, young Indigenous women courageously took stand against the racism.

“Mr. Speaker, it is 2020 and this is not okay. First, it is time for racism to be a thing of the past. Every time we hear of racial tensions in the United States, we sit back, north of the border and judge in dismay; but, when it comes to our treatment of Canada’s Indigenous people, we do not seem to draw the same comparison.

“Second, Mr. Speaker, it is not the responsibility of our Indigenous children to stand up to racism. Indigenous people have been fighting for land, language, culture, and life for hundreds of years. It is our responsibility as colonizers to stand up for our neighbours, friends, and family; to teach our children history and compassion, to build children who grow into adults who can take part in the change we are all fighting for and demanding here today.

“Mr. Speaker, 90 per cent of homeless people on Yellowknife streets are Indigenous, upwards of 90 per cent of our corrections populations are Indigenous, and 99 per cent of our foster care system is Indigenous. Our system is rooted in colonial, systemic racism, and we are working hard to change that here together, but what becomes of all our hard work when we are not doing the same work at home?

“As much as it is our responsibility to stand up outside the home, it is our responsibility to have deep conversations in our homes.

“The transgenerational trauma of what was done to Indigenous people so that my ancestors could live in this country is raw, and it is my job to teach my children about history, racism, privilege, and responsibility.

“While we use the word reconciliation like a cool noun, it means nothing unless we are willing to stand up for change, to stand up for healing, and, as colonizers, let go. It means not fooling ourselves into thinking we have our finger on the pulse of our territory when we actually have our thumb on progress.

“As a parent, and as a politician, to be effective we have to be prepared to play the long game. The choices we make in this house, in our homes

and in social settings, all play into our success as Northerners.

“This change does not require more money to our education system, or more money to our healthcare network. This is a grassroots change that requires doing what is right, and what is required, for a better, stronger North.

“Thank you, Mr. Speaker.”

Posted on

February 29, 2020

Tags

Colonization, NWTpoli, Racism Edit

# The 19th assembly stumbles & fumbles into 2020

The territorial government has failed another competency test — its second major blunder in its short life — as it fumbled a high-profile personnel matter on a key file.

Or should I say continues to stumble over, as of this writing, the very messy firing of Aurora College president Tom Weegar is still being hotly debated in the media and in the halls of the NWT Legislative Assembly.



*Until the end of January, Tom Weegar was Aurora College president and associate deputy minister of post-secondary education renewal. LinkedIn photo*

Weegar was hired in February 2019 out of Ontario to lead the college's transformation into a polytechnic university. The project is seen as a major step in the territory's quest to both lure students to a centre of education excellence here and also to train our young people for jobs that are needed in our economy.

The GNWT boasts it “... will be creating a new kind of institution that will better meet the needs of NWT residents, employers and communities. A polytechnic university, building on our existing college, is the most efficient, effective and practical path towards providing more post-secondary education and training opportunities in the north, for northerners.”

I fully support this project. I also understand critics who believe it is a misuse of public funds, as the junior kindergarten to Grade 12 education system is in dire need of help. The latter is especially true in smaller communities, where truancy, poor grades and low graduation rates are serious issues. In the capital, we have high school grads who have been provided with a bare-bones education that hasn't prepared them for post-secondary studies.





Just one year ago, then education minister Caroline Cochrane welcomed the new Aurora College president: “Dr. Weegar’s strategic and operational leadership will be critical to the future of postsecondary education in the NWT. His background in Indigenous education is especially relevant and important here in the north.”

But I don’t think the creation of a decent post-secondary institution will do anything but help put a sharper focus on the importance of learning throughout the entire system. A polytechnic university would build a skilled labour force, attract international students and teachers and attract research money. Yellowknife could benefit from new student housing and the economic impact of an increased population.

That’s if the transformation process can survive the clown show now being staged by some members of the NWT’s executive council.

Weegar's abrupt dismissal at the end of January and the ensuing explanations, counter-spin and allegations — oh, and of course, blaming the media — have provided all with a lesson in how to craft a communications nightmare. I'm not going to debate the merits of turfing Weegar, who was hired in February 2019 after nationwide search.

I do find it rather odd that his replacement — Andy Bevan, formerly assistant deputy minister of labour and income security — was found in short order and without relocation costs. It's also passing strange that Cochrane, as education minister, showered mighty praise on Weegar just one year ago. Us taxpayers are also on the hook for one year of Weegar's salary which he will receive as severance (after just 10 months actual time on the job).

Nope, I'll trust Cochrane, now as premier, had good reason to make the move. What I do take exception to is the complete failure of the GNWT's internal and external communications. This failure made the government look rather inept. It also did nothing to help the morale of students and staff at the college.

As CBC North noted: Education Minister R.J. Simpson “told three different versions of the story over three days.”

The first rule of political comms is pretty simple: Don't lie. Sure, you can selectively withhold certain facts and put the best spin on the rest. But once you are caught in a lie, the coverup becomes worse than the crime, so to speak. And even an innocent mistake can take on a sinister appearance if it isn't admitted to and fully owned as quickly as possible.

At first, Simpson told Cabin Radio that Weegar left his position last week to “pursue other opportunities.” But hours later, the rookie minister from Hay River admitted Weegar had been fired.

On top of that, Weegar told CBC News he was caught completely off guard by the dismissal.

Here’s a timeline of events, as compiled from various media reports:

- In early February, CBC News obtained an email between Weegar and Martin Goldney, the secretary to cabinet and deputy minister of executive and Indigenous Affairs, asking for Weegar to write a departure email to all faculty and staff at Aurora College. The email suggests Weegar stepped away from the position.

- On Feb. 5, Simpson told Cabin Radio that Weegar left to “pursue other opportunities.”
- On Feb. 6, Simpson flip-flopped and in a media scrum told reporters: “Stories change and it came out that it was termination.” The minister also said he wasn’t aware of the circumstances of Weegar’s dismissal: ”I wasn’t sitting in those conversations so I didn’t know if it was an outright firing. I didn’t know if maybe both parties said to each other, ‘you know what, I think it is time to go our separate ways.’” That scrum was cut short by a cabinet communications officer.
- On Feb. 7, both Cochrane and Simpson tried to squish all that messy Weegar toothpaste back into the tube by calling the whole thing a human resources matter that shouldn’t be openly discussed. Simpson blamed media reports for the confusion. In the legislative assembly Simpson said he recommended to Cochrane that Weegar be fired. However

Weegar then told media the confusion was the result of “a number of mistruths that have been spoken and the minister was caught on them.”

This comms botch-job closely followed another head-scratcher involving the broken child welfare system.

In mid-January, Tammy Roberts, executive director of the Foster Family Coalition of the NWT, told media foster-care parents and adoption caregivers are “exhausted and unsupported” by a child services system that’s failing children.

The GNWT had just claimed progress following a severely critical 2018 federal Auditor General report. But Roberts was having none of it and

stories from foster parents were offered as evidence.

On Dec. 12, over a dozen foster parents and adoptive caregivers met with representatives from Health and Social Services and members of Yellowknife's health authority. Roberts sent a 27-page summary of the meeting, along with a host of recommendations, to newly appointed Health and Social Services Minister Diane Thom.

“This is our modern day residential school crisis,” Roberts tells Thom, in a letter accompanying the Dec. 12 meeting summary.

The minister responded to Roberts in a letter with the usual bureaucratic boilerplate bullcrap: “We want to continue to work closely with Indigenous governments and organizations, our frontline staff and those accessing our



services. Their feedback, as well as reviewing quantitative data, on a regular basis will show if we are on the right track, or if we need to add new or adjust existing action items.”

Foster caregivers weren't impressed with that wilted word salad. It prompted many to crash Premier Cochrane's constituency meeting on Jan. 27.

In media reports, one caregiver there characterized the last government as an “old boy's club,” where complaints and requests for meetings often fell on deaf ears.

A former social worker and member of the Metis community, Cochrane was CEO of the Centre for Northern Families, a social service agency administered by the Yellowknife Women's Society. One would expect she could realize some proper fixes for the child welfare system.

And she probably can. If given a fair chance by the bureaucracy, which needs to holster its 'action items' and ease up on 'reviewing quantitative data.' Nobody believes that bunk.

During last year's election, it was repeatedly stated that it was imperative to have more women in government. The electorate responded and sent a record number of women to the 19th Legislative Assembly.

In fact, with nine of 19 MLAs being female, it made the NWT the jurisdiction with the highest proportion of women lawmakers in the country. The old boys club has been banished. This group of lawmakers hold great promise. I am looking forward to seeing what it can do; how it can be so very different from assemblies past. However, has the bureaucracy and other political staff received that things-have-changed memo?

The majority of children under the GNWT's care are Indigenous. The disproportionate representation is rooted in the enduring impacts of colonialism, inter-generational trauma and the residential school system.

Each day in the Yellowknife courthouse, stories are told of how a child's troubled upbringing — which has undoubtedly involved contact with the social services department and the foster care system — has contributed to them being charged with various crimes as an older youth or an adult.

It's often heard that school became an afterthought once a child in a troubled house hit their teens. Most of the pre-sentence reports I hear in court each week detail how the child welfare system failed them. Or how they never finished high school. Or both.

Health, education and social services are some of the toughest areas for any government to get a handle on. Nobody expects miracles.

But while we wait to see what cures this new assembly can develop, scandals sparked by poor internal and external communications just shouldn't be happening.

They are the unforced errors of the political world. They do nothing to help the new government build trust and confidence with the people who elected it.

Posted on

February 23, 2020

Tags

Aurora College, NWTpoli Edit

**Getting a hangover  
from inaction on  
Yellowknife's  
drinking problem**



*The Pop-up Park is a popular place for street drinkers to relax in the city's downtown. Is this sight supposed to be a boost for tourism, or an attractive sight for newcomers to the community? While watching these folks one evening last weekend, a MED bylaw patrol drove past. And didn't stop. Surely this type of activity can be curbed. It is illegal, after all.*

**“The liquor store, opened in 1939, was perhaps the most lucrative enterprise in the**

**community.”** — *A Social Geography of Yellowknife, 1976.*

**“I was downtown ... with street drinkers. We drink wine, Private Stock, and hang around.”** — *Peter Tsetta, an unemployed ex-con whose daily routine included commuting from Ndilo to downtown Yellowknife.*

**“There were a lot of people drinking on the street that day?”** — *Crown attorney Annie Piche, in cross examination of Peter Tsetta, on trial recently for two sexual assaults.*

**“There were a lot of people.”** — *Was Tsetta’s reply.*

**“... no person shall consume liquor in a public place.”** — *NWT Liquor Act.*

**“The bottom line is that someone in this city needs to start enforcing NWT Liquor Act violations. If nobody does, downtown business owners, shoppers, workers and tourists pay the price. — *City Coun. Adrian Bell, 2017.***

There is a small, but vibrant community of people in Yellowknife known as “street drinkers.”

These folks are clearly alcoholics, many of them are homeless and basically live out of the Day Shelter/Sobering Centre on 50 Street. They meet each morning near the downtown liquor store, where those with money purchase the favourite drink of the street, Private Stock. It’s a



disgusting, but cheap, swill. Thankfully, it comes in a shatter-proof plastic container, as the empties litter parking lots and alleys in the city's core.

When the street drinkers have some extra cash, they splurge on a mickey of Smirnoff vodka. Being a good capitalistic business, the downtown liquor store — both of the city's booze retailers are privately operated — keeps both of those products handy under the front cash register for quick sales.



*The best-sellers for street drinkers — Private Stock wine and mickeys of vodka — are readily stocked at the cash register for quick and more secure sales at the downtown Liquor Store.*

I have seen staff refuse to serve clearly intoxicated people on several occasions, but I've also seen people load up bags or backpacks with the popular booze.

Yellowknife has always been a rough-and-tumble town. It grew as the mines expanded and the men who dug for gold were tough customers.

Add to that an Indigenous population saddled with alcohol addiction thanks to the European colonizers, and alcohol has been fuelling life in this city for decades.

However, as the mining industry evolves — it's still a key factor to the NWT's existence — a more diversified economy is being sought.

And as the GNWT looks to grow a seriously promising tourism sector — folks from afar who are likely scared of aggressive panhandlers and locals fighting in the streets — Yellowknife needs to adapt. Sure, we are still a blue-collar town, but we also have a large number of white-collar workers, mostly for government. In fact, Yellowknife is a very prosperous place, overall. Apart from the thin slice of abject poverty in the city's social pie chart.

But more on that later.

It's time to curb street drinking. Period. No more dancing around the issue. No more free-range open boozing — unless it's on a licensed sidewalk patio.

To tackle the problem, our elected officials and the various agencies they fund must separate it into two issues:

1. Liquor sales and consumption laws.
2. Mental health and addictions.

Apart from what some could think, these two issues are not interconnected. It's old-school thinking to approach alcoholism with prohibition in mind. And our outdated and downright dumb liquor laws are just that: a limp-wristed form of prohibition.

Hands up — who thinks restricting access to alcohol through liquor store hours and

hospitality sector regulations are doing anything to help stop alcoholism? If you do, then you also learned nothing from the failure of 1930's-era prohibition. You also haven't been exposed to the street culture and have known many alcoholics/drug addicts.

Addiction is a combination of genetic sensitivity and psychological need. Having an addiction is like having an itch that can't be scratched; your mental torment can only be satiated with your drug of choice.

And you will do whatever needs to be done to make that happen. For some people, addiction will lead to jail or death. For others, recovery can be a real thing.

Those people sitting in Pop-up Park and sipping on cheap booze — what the hell is happening with that pallet-riddled wasteland of a

playground this year anyhow? — need a lot of things. What they don't need is a crackdown on operating hours of liquor stores. Or an impossible to enforce daily purchase quota.

That will lead to burglaries or bootlegging. It could also drive people to drink non-potable liquids. Such as hairspray. Or it could lead to a paint/gasoline huffing problem.

That's what was happening in Winnipeg couple of decades ago. The ancient liquor laws and prohibition-lite attempts to curb booze abuse by out-of-touch lawmakers saw the city's tenderloin district turn into a dumping site for empty paint and gasoline containers.

It was frying people's brains. I went and interviewed some of those folks, many with paint covering their lips and cheeks. It was horrible.

So what did Winnipeg do? It actually got the province to open one of its downtown liquor stores (they are all government run) early in the morning and extend the hours later to let the drunks be drunks.

But I digress. Back to Yellowknife's street drinkers and the issues in our city.

What those people need, by and large, is a law enforcement crackdown to let them know they can't flaunt the existing Liquor Act and Criminal Code laws. Those of us who obey our laws, expect them to be enforced for everyone.

*Liquor Act: 85. (1) Except as provided by this Act and the regulations, no person shall consume liquor in a public place.*

I note in its latest report to city council, the local RCMP detachment stated it did 56 patrols of the downtown area. “A total of 76 bottles of liquor were seized and destroyed,” stated the report. “Fifty-four patrols were dedicated in the Sobering Centre/Day Shelter immediate surroundings.”

However, just take a drive through that area on any given evening — especially now that the long summer days are here — and you will see street drinkers flaunting the liquor laws. I did just that last Saturday night. I took the photo at the top of the article just as I pulled up to the Reddi Mart.

And a Municipal Enforcement Division (MED) patrol drove right past.

In 2013, then city councillors Linda Bussey and Rebecca Alty — the latter now being our mayor



— wrote letters in support of MLA Darryl Dolyny’s motion to strengthen the ability of municipal enforcement officers to enforce liquor infractions.

“Enforcement is one component of addressing our alcohol related issues, it is definitely a tool that can help municipal and territorial governments to work together to enforce NWT liquor laws,” they wrote.

November 7, 2013

Legislative Assembly  
Box 1320  
Yellowknife NT X1A 2L9

**Re: Motion on Strengthening Municipal Enforcement of NWT Liquor Laws**

Dear Madams and Sirs,

The purpose of this letter is to support MLA Dolyny's motion "Strengthening Municipal Enforcement of NWT Liquor Laws."

As mentioned in the motion:

1. alcohol abuse is a prevalent problem in the Northwest Territories (NWT);
2. alcohol abuse is one of the biggest challenges to policing in communities across the NWT;
3. strengthening the ability of municipal enforcement officers to enforce liquor infractions would, in NWT communities that have a municipal enforcement presence, address a perceived shortfall in policing; and
4. giving municipal enforcement officers the authority to fully enforce NWT liquor laws would enable a municipality to take on this enhanced responsibility *only* if the municipality chooses to do so.

This is not the magic bullet that will solve all of our alcohol related issues, but it is one tool that can help municipal and territorial governments work together to enforce NWT liquor laws.

I look forward to further discussions with the public, elected officials across the NWT, the department of Finance and any other stakeholders, if the Legislative Assembly approves this motion.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Alty  
Yellowknife City Councillor  
ralty@yellowknife.ca

Coun. Niels Konge also wrote in support of that 2013 motion:

“I am in full support of Mr. Dolyny’s motion to pass amendments to the Liquor Act or other legislation, as required, to provide municipal enforcement officers with the authority to enforce liquor Infractions. It is a well know fact that In Yellowknife there are Issues on the street level with public drinking, drunkenness and other liquor related activities that are not acceptable to society In general, and currently bylaw officers do not have the ability to enforce any liquor infractions. Passing these recommended amendments will add another tool In the tool box that If the city of Yellowknlfe so choses to use it can.”

What ever happened to that push? Apparently nothing.

In 2017, then city councillor Adrian Bell called on MED “to begin reporting to council on the number of referrals they make to the RCMP per month for criminal activity and violations of the NWT Liquor Act that they observe during the course of their work.”

Bell was concerned — and rightly so — over the policy that only has MED officers able to call RCMP over issues such as open liquor in the streets. And the RCMP had indicated it will not respond to those simple crimes.

“The bottom line,” stated Bell, “is that someone in this city needs to start enforcing NWT Liquor Act violations. If nobody does, downtown business owners, shoppers, workers and tourists pay the price.”

Another idea brought up by former councillor Bell during his failed campaign for mayor in

2018 was to set up a downtown ambassador program.

Bell explained: “These are people in friendly looking uniforms who “provide a variety of public safety, hospitality and goodwill services ... unarmed and non-confrontational ... and providing outreach services to both the homeless and business communities.”



Winnipeg core-area business association helped set up a Downtown Watch program about two decades ago to help deal with an uptick in panhandling and safety. It was at a time when there was also a major push to rejuvenate the downtown area, just before the arena was built.

While a much smaller city, Yellowknife is in a similar situation. The major project coming? Very likely a university.

I've seen these types of programs work in other communities. Years ago, I spent a day on patrol with the Downtown Watch in Winnipeg — Downtown Winnipeg BIZ was a client of my photo studio at the time — and saw the great work this type of outreach and info worker can do. In Winnipeg, the city's business community funded the patrol. In Yellowknife, it would be up to council to source funding in any way it would

deem appropriate — perhaps with some support from the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, as it's members would benefit greatly.

Why can't our elected leaders actually get something accomplished on this file? Does the current air of being overly politically correct pollute some thinking?

For city council to emphasize such fanciful programs such as wayfinder signage over cleaning up the streets is farcical.

Enforcing existing legislation will make difference. I suspect it will wake a few street drinkers up. They might even reach out for help.

Others might need to be gently nudged into treatment by the legal system, once they amass a



few tickets for illegal possession of liquor in a public place and public intoxication. Recovery, whether through a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous or one that incorporates Indigenous spiritual methods, does work. Not for everyone, but for many.

Others will need to be diverted into supported housing (the Arnica Inn conversion is on point).

Then, there needs to be transitional education and work programs. Where the concept of earning a wage to support a clean and sober lifestyle can be realized. One of the best tonics for desperation and substance abuse is hope.

I will not use this space again to lambaste the GNWT for refusing to set up a residential treatment centre in this city. An election is coming. Hopefully it will be an issue.

I have also previously blogged on the problems with the combined Day Shelter/Sobering Centre model. Again, I hope this comes up during the election.

But I digress.

So now that we've made progress on the addictions/mental health side of the booze puzzle, it's time to modernize the Liquor Act.

This will bring unparalleled opportunities for the hospitality and tourism sectors, while also making life here just a lot more fun.

It will not make for more street drinkers.

It will make this place more vibrant. It will open opportunities for bars, pubs, lounges, restaurants. It will provide more employment opportunities.

This point was hammered home by many city councillors during a recent meeting of the Governance and Priorities Committee.

The issue was brought to the fore by Mayor Rebecca Alty. However, she was serving up the idea of restricting liquor store hours and daily sales allotments per person.

Her Worship cited a University of Victoria study, that showed the NWT has the second highest rate of alcohol consumption per capita in Canada. It also gave the NWT a failing 'F' grade on what I can only determine is some form of Victorian-era inspired algorithm.

I note, one of the study's "expert reviewers" is Dr. Robyn Burton of King's College London, who in 2018 co-authored a paper entitled, "No level of alcohol consumption improves health."

Harrumph.

Now I don't fault Mayor Alty for bringing the U of V study to council for discussion. That's exactly what a good political leader should be doing. We want new ideas to be brought forward. Even if the outcome isn't what might be expected.

I was sitting in the public gallery at that committee meeting last week. And I have to say, I was pleasantly surprised to see our council in action.

Allow me to boil things down in a few quotes from some councillors:

*Mayor Alty: "Various research has shown that restricting alcohol sales hours of sale for two or*

*more hours could effectively decrease alcohol related crimes.*

*“That would be my recommendation, that council work with the GNWT to implement best practices regarding the physical availability of alcohol, or consider a reduction in the hours of operation. And relating to pricing and taxation (increases), there is something probably there too.”*

**Coun. Konge:** *“I’d like to thank Mayor Alty for bringing this forward, however I disagree with every comment she has made. I lived in Europe for eight years. You can go to the grocery store at 8 o’clock in the morning and buy beer. There is a totally different culture around alcohol.*

*“I actually think having access to alcohol opened up and more available will reduce some of the issues that we are having in the downtown.*

*The same people will be heavily intoxicated, but they won't be doing it all at the same time (after the liquor store opens each day).*

*“Let's open (the liquor store) up on Sundays. It's going to reduce the bootlegging. “I would like to ask the (GNWT) minister of finance to extend hours of operation, open up on Sundays and have beer and wine stores (separately established).”*

***Coun. Julian Morse:*** *“When we are talking about the most pervasive problems related to alcohol, these are pretty severe addictions issues. If people are feeding a serious addiction, there aren't a lot of constraints you can put in place to stop them.”*

***Coun. Robin Williams:*** *“Deregulation will certainly help. If entrepreneurial spirit was allowed to grow, we could have some higher-end*

*liquor stores, we could have some boutique places. To take some of that negative stigma off of it. To market it as the product it is ... a recreational product.”*

**Coun. Stacie Smith:** *“Twenty-four hours (liquor sales) I think would be ideal, you have less want for an item if it’s something you can get all the time. We’re looking at this in the wrong way — liquor isn’t the issue, mental health is the issue. Addiction is the issue.”*

**Coun. Steve Payne:** *“We are nothing like anywhere else in Canada ... the government has put such strong restrictions on (alcohol), but people still drink. I think we need to loosen the controls and restrictions. (In my business, Ragged Ass Barbers in YK Centre), I would love to serve somebody a beer. I’m sure James O’Connor over there would love to have a beer while getting a haircut in the barber shop. Or*

*someone going into a spa and having a glass of wine. (Government) is always standing in the way of business.*

Yes, I did get a shout out. Yes, I get my haircuts in his very hip business. Yes, I would enjoy sipping on a lager while having a trim.

As for the discussion at the committee of council? I really hope it ends up in new public policy. Alty said it will be up to councillors to bring forward recommendations for further discussion.

Blah, blah, blah folks — Like, c'mon, get something done!

Some could suggest opening up the liquor laws would encourage more drunk driving. While I am extremely aware of the issues of drinking



and driving — and I volunteer with the new Yellowknife MADD chapter — if people have the idea that breaking the law to drink and drive is OK, they will do it whenever they want. It is up to education campaigns such as MADD combined with enforcement from police to deter such criminal activity.

I note the NWT is one of only two Canadian jurisdictions that requires mandatory warning labels on all alcohol containers sold in retail stores. There is a push to augment those labels even further with the addition of images of some sort.

So it's not as if people shouldn't be aware of the dangers of booze.

However, the positive aspects of opening up liquor store sales times and easing restrictions on bars, lounges, brew pubs and breweries — and

the associated tax revenue from that activity — can outweigh the negatives.

If we are to truly become a tourist mecca, people on vacation want to have fun. They want to visit a place that is set up for hospitality. We also need to deal with the addictions issue in a forthright, respectful and effective manner.

Right now, we are not doing any of that very well. And everyone in the city is suffering as a result, in one way or another.

—

***UPDATE:*** I asked Mayor Alty about the move years ago to strengthen the ability of municipal enforcement officers to enforce liquor infractions.

Here's her response: "We've had discussions with Justice on the possibility and what the risks would be, but no changes or real movement – both sides have had other priorities come up that has taken staff resources so this has been put on the back burner."

Posted on

June 30, 2019

Tags

#Alcoholism, Council, Downtown, GNWT, Hospitality, Recovery, Tourism, Yellowknife Edit

# **How should violent Indigenous men be**

# dealt with by the courts?



An Indigenous man is being sentenced for sexually assaulting his same-race partner.

Should the judge give him a break because he has grown up in tough circumstances under the dark cloud of colonialism and the legacy of mistreatment in the residential school system? Or, should he have the book thrown at him because he attacked an Indigenous woman?

That is the problem the Canadian justice is now facing, as it grapples with balancing the longstanding Gladue principles in sentencing with the findings in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) that calls on the federal government to consider violence against Indigenous women an aggravating factor during sentencing.

So in the end, the Indigenous rapist could end up receiving the same type of sentence, on balance, than a non-Indigenous offender would face.

This predicament is of interest to me as I've been covering a number of sex assault trials and sentencings in Yellowknife recently. And all of those charged were Indigenous men. And all but one of the victims were Indigenous females.

The other was a man-on-man groping in a jail cell. The offender was very drunk when he did it — and received a punch in his face from the victim — and was very embarrassed about answering for it in court.

But I digress.

The longstanding Gladue principle — implemented twenty years ago last April — named after Cree woman Jamie Tanis Gladue, requires judges to take into consideration circumstances facing Indigenous peoples in order to arrive at an appropriate sentence, including alternatives to jail time.

Gladue factors include information about whether the offenders or his parents/caregivers attended residential school, spent time in foster care, or have struggled with alcohol or drug abuse.

The idea at the time was to try and reduce the number of Indigenous offenders behind bars — that segment of society being “over-represented” in Canadian jails.

So I hear the term “Gladue factors” mentioned all the time by Crowns, defence lawyers and judges.

And days after the June 3 release of the 1,200-page MMIWG final report, I heard a Crown mention it in a sentencing hearing for an Inuvialuit man who had pleaded guilty to assaulting his partner and five breaches of court orders.

The new report “shows the level of violence being inflicted on Indigenous women needs to be addressed through sentencing,” said Crown prosecutor Pierre-Luc Bergeron on June 7 in Territorial Court.

“There needs to be a message communicated throughout the Northwest Territories that violence against a partner is unacceptable.

“The principle of denunciation and deterrence must be emphasized.”

Now the final report also calls for Gladue reports to be considered as a right for female offenders and to have national standards and appropriate funding for them. But that’s the flip side of the Gladue coin, so to speak. And a blog for another day.



This is about the potential harm the Gladue sentencing principles for male offenders could be doing to the female victims of violent crime, according to the MMIWG report.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has promised an action plan to address the report's findings. We'll see what ends up being codified in law.

It could end up that Indigenous males facing sentencing for crimes of violence against Indigenous females could be sentenced as anyone else would be under similar circumstances.

But in terms of being proactive, the root causes to all of the violence in the NWT must be addressed. Repeated data reports show the northern territories have the highest rate of violent crime and sexual assault in Canada.

Between 2016 and 2017, the rate of police-reported sexual assaults (all levels combined) increased 22 per cent above the national average in the NWT. That's very grim.

What drives all of it? Well, alcoholism is mentioned as a factor in every single case of sexual assault I've covered this year.

Every single case.

Sure, I understand that people turn to alcohol and drugs to deal with depression and sadness. So jobs and hope are needed to help address that.

Many offenders express a desire to get off the booze. Sure, they are telling this to a judge who holds their future in their hands. But many really, really want to turn their lives around.

That's why I find it alarming — nay, astounding — that the GNWT steadfastly refuses to establish a residential treatment centre in the territory.

We send those seeking recovery south to B.C. or Alberta, then hope they can stay sober when flown back to their communities here. Good luck with that.

What happens with the findings overall from the MMIWG report will be interesting to see. There are many, many positive and doable determinations out of the 231 in the report.

But the GNWT needs to take action now on attempting to deal with a real problem that is at the centre of the issue, to my mind. And that is alcohol and drug abuse.

*UPDATE: Well, that didn't take long. Shortly after this blog was posted, a local judge discussed at length what he termed the Gladue "paradox." See my story from the courthouse [here](#).*

Posted on

June 13, 2019

Tags

#Legal, courts, Crime, MMIWG, Yellowknife Edit

# **Trudeau's Soot Tax to be a dark day for NWT**



**“The reality is, if you pollute, you’re going to have to pay. There are going to be segments of the population — and industry is part of that — who are going to see a cost. It was in the platform (in 2015) we would be moving forward, I knew it was in the plan, and I knew when I ran.”**

— *NWT Liberal MP Michael McLeod, interview, March 2018.*

**“People waking up on (Sept.) 1, 2019 will first see prices at gas pumps have shot up – 4.7 cents per litre at first, increasing to 11.7 cents by 2020. Then over a short period of time, they will notice certain goods and services will also be more expensive. Everything we depend on to survive and house ourselves up here – food, clothing, building materials – will be subject to higher transportation cost as the trucks coming north will be paying more for fuel.”**

— *James O’Connor, Yellowknifer column, July 2018*

Hey folks ... on Sept. 1, the economy of the NWT’s economy will start to tank — starting with a spike in the price you pay to fill your gas tanks.

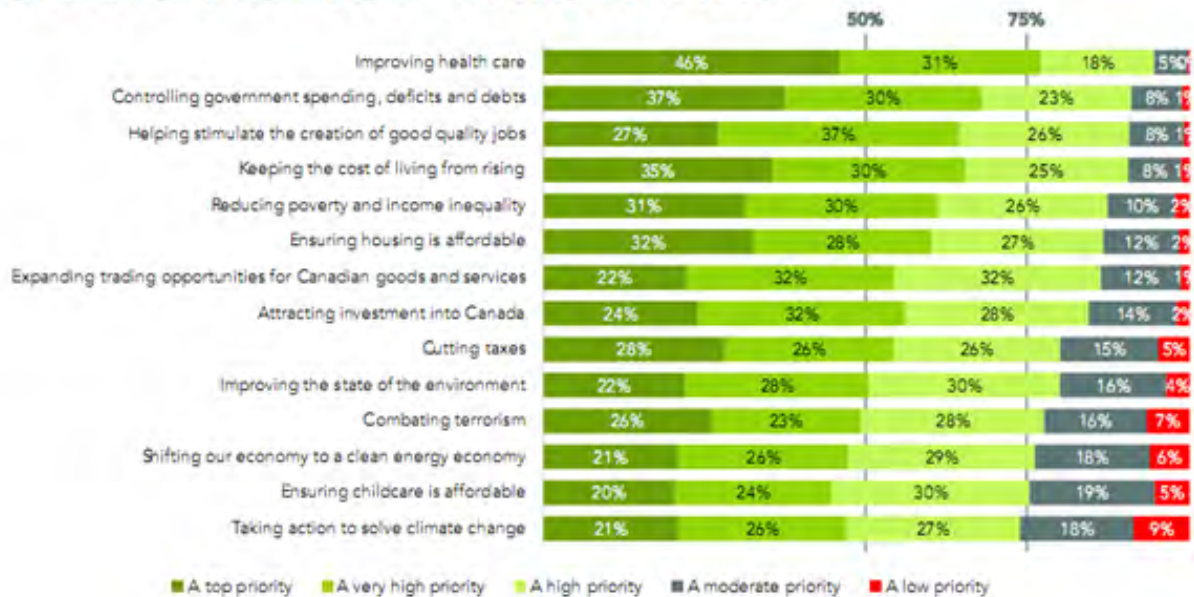
I'm sure you haven't forgotten the country elected Justin "Sunny Ways" Trudeau in 2015. And remember that pesky election promise he made? The federal Liberals had to prove they were woke enough to impose a tax on carbon. That's that black stuff otherwise known as soot that is produced from burning things.

In the North, we burn fuel to, well ... live. We need tough vehicles to get around, we need to fly in and out of the NWT's 33 communities, we need to stay warm as it gets rather chilly up here in winter.

While it would be great if pollution were to be curbed across the world, certain parts of this country simply can't be expected to sing in harmony with the taxing tune played by Justin & The Grits. Even with the lyrics being updated from "global warming," to "climate change" to

the current “climate crisis” refrain. (What next? Climate armageddon? Oh, my!)

## PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES



In fact, the evolving climate doesn’t usually rank as a top concern of many people. In fact, it usually is well down the list of concerns people want their governments to take action on. Well below better health care, jobs, improved public housing and lower taxes.

A new Nanos Research survey shows majority of Canadians are worried — or somewhat worried



— about the increasing price of gas. An issue aggravated by Trudeau's Soot Tax.

The survey, commissioned by CTV News, found that 38 per cent of Canadians are worried and 32 per cent are somewhat worried about rising fuel costs.

With an eye to the fall's federal election campaign — and of special concern to the governing Liberals — more than half of the Canadians surveyed, reported CTV, said they think the carbon tax is an ineffective (36 per cent) or somewhat ineffective (19 per cent) way to encourage people to cut down on their fuel use.

In the days and weeks after Sept. 1, vehicles that move the materials around the city and territory will be paying higher gas prices.

“It’s the extra tax on gasoline that will have the immediate kind of impact that people will notice,” deputy minister of Finance David Stewart told me at a media conference last year. “Other taxes for trucking coming into the North, those sorts of things, there certainly will be an impact on that. That maybe will eventually impact consumer prices. That’s why we did the cost of living offset.”

Moving companies, delivery companies — even the pizza places — will have to deal with higher gas prices. That, logically, means passing those increased costs along to consumers.

Interestingly, Trudeau has peddled rebates for his carbon tax through income tax returns through much of Canada before it even has been fully implemented across the country. These Climate Action Incentives have been dismissed as a cynical election ploy by his critics.

We're being faced with this egregious intrusion into our daily lives ultimately thanks to Trudeau's signing the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015. That's the questionably ambitious scheme to deal with greenhouse-gas-emissions — to which some major global polluters are not a part of and the United States is poised to withdraw from.

In my previous role as editor of *Yellowknifer*, I had attended the media conference a few days earlier when NWT Finance Minister Robert C. McLeod came clean over how the NWT was going to respond to the Trudeau government's carbon tax scheme.

The GNWT was, after all, a tepidly reluctant signatory to the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change

“The made in the North approach balances implementing carbon pricing as a tool to incent behaviours to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with investments in initiatives and programs that lead to greater use of renewable and cleaners fuels, while ensuring that we minimize impacts on the cost of living and doing business in the NWT,” stated a GNWT news release.

Yeah, I just don't see how further increasing the already ultra-expensive cost of living in the NWT will “incent behaviours” — it's more likely to incent people and businesses to leave. Or to look for a political party with a better plan to combat air pollution than the Liberals.

I still remember the Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute ad campaign from the '70s. Anti-pollution initiatives are not new in Canada and across the globe. But the ferocity of the carbon tax being wielded like a political axe through the economy

and into people's wallets is astonishingly poor policy.

Sure, developing green energy alternatives to replace the diesel-burning power plants used across the NWT for power would be great, but it's going to cost millions — if not billions — and will take years and years to implement.

And I do think every country across the globe needs to work to reduce emissions to try and mitigate future damage.

However, one country alone — such as Canada — or even a group of countries won't have much impact if some of the worst offenders aren't joining in. Hello China, India, Russia, etc.

And the tiny impact any reduction in fuel use in the NWT will have on the big picture just isn't worth the problems it will cause for us.

I am not a climate change denier. Obviously, the Earth's climate changes over time. And the planet has been getting slightly warmer in recent decades.

But I'm not going to let those fluctuations in weather — which have been heavily politicized — dominate my every waking minute. The science is not settled on the effect man-made pollution is having on the slow rolling global heat wave.

But the hype on global warming is white-hot.

What with click-bait headlines such as this recent one from *Chatelaine Magazine* (yes, it apparently is still a thing):

*“This Yellowknife ER Doctor is raising the alarm about the mental health impact of climate change: Anxiety, PTSD and depression are just the beginning.”*

The piece itself provided no hard evidence, just anecdotes of what could be happening. But, of course, the conclusion is that a carbon tax is the answer.

*“Carbon pricing,” Chatelaine quoted Dr. Howard as saying, “is the best tool available for tackling the public health issues resulting from climate change. She compared it to efforts to reduce tobacco consumption.”*

Umm, people still smoke. A lot.

And then there was this local perspective from Dr. Howard in *Chatelaine*:

*Some of the mental health impacts of climate change are directly related to physical effects. Extreme forest fires around Yellowknife in 2014 led to people feeling lonely, isolated and anxious because of their inability to get outside and do things like berry picking and walking, said Howard.*

Hmmm. Why did I bother reading that silly report. Just made me mad. After hearing this week that the NWT last year had one of the slowest fire seasons on record, with 59 fires and almost 16,000 hectares burned.



But then I saw (and clicked on) this story from CBC's The Current last month:

*“This woman won't have children because of climate change. She says she's not alone.”*

It's good that she's not alone. She clearly needs help.

And this caught my eye recently from *Yellowknifer*:

*“Young Yellowknifers strike for action on climate change.”*

Some of the picketing students admitted they were missing school for the protest. Did they have permission? Did their teachers encourage them to attend? Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green and Range Lake MLA Kevin O'Reilly

were at the post office rally, supporting the teenagers.

The green kids were on strike from school again on May 24 outside the NWT Legislative Assembly, this time garnering praise on Twitter from Yellowknife North MLA Cory Vanthuyne. Again, while I'm not criticizing the student's anti-pollution position, I just don't understand how they can skip school for the cause.

Oh, but I digress. Back to the economy killing Trudeau Soot Tax.

To date, I haven't heard how the rebate plan will actually work in the NWT. But after not seeing the Climate Action Incentive on my 2018 professionally completed return, ratepayers here will have to fork over cash first before seeing rebates. Those give-backs being \$260 annually

per adult and and \$300 for each child for the soot levy.

For small business, rebated amounts for heating fuel could range annually from about \$1,000 to more than \$5,000 depending on the nature of the business. But nothing for the fuel used in vehicles.

Apart from its solution to Trudeau's carbon pricing boondoggle, the GNWT is really working to address the changing weather patterns.

On May 1, 2018, the GNWT released the 2030 NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework. It has three key goals: transition to a lower carbon economy; improve knowledge of climate change impacts; and build resilience and adapt to a changing climate.

There is also a naturally occurring move towards society thinking greener. Corporations and industry will repond to the market's demands, becoming more climate aware as consumers demand it.

But a heavy-handed and politically motivated carbon tax is the wrong way to go. It will only work to build resentment in people like me towards the whole green movement.

But Canadians will have a chance to vote on the carbon tax in the federal election this fall.

The carbon tax is bound to be a top campaign issue, with Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer quoted as saying he'll scrap the tax if elected.

That position is sure to see many people kicking the Tories' electoral tires as they feel the pressure of increased prices at the pump.

*Update: On June 5, the GNWT decided to push back implementation of the carbon tax to Sept. 1 from July 1, citing a legislative backlog. The copy above has been edited to reflect that change.*

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Tags

Carbon tax, Cost of

living, Election, NWT, Politics, Yellowknife Edit