

Return to Written Question Retour à la Question écrite

No./Nu.12-20(1)

The Honourable R.J. Simpson
Premier

Cost of Living

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question asked by the Member for Yellowknife Centre on November 1, 2024, regarding cost of living.

It is recognized that the Northwest Territories is a high-cost jurisdiction - the territory's remoteness, climate and small population mean that baseline costs for goods and services are high, compared to other jurisdictions. With this, the Government of the Northwest Territories pursues programs and measures to help alleviate cost-of-living pressures faced by Northerners where, as a public government, we are able to do so in a fiscally responsible and sustainable way.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has, over the years, implemented targeted cost-of-living relief measures to support residents. Such initiatives include increasing income support benefits, enhancements to the Senior Home Heating Subsidy in 2024, as well as maintaining the Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Property Tax Relief Program. Additionally, work has been done to enhance food security through building local agriculture and commercial fishery sectors, as well as the development of territorial meat inspection regulations to promote the availability of locally harvested and affordable food.

The GNWT also expanded the regional Cost of Living Offset, introducing geographic zones to ensure residents in areas with higher heating costs, such as the Beaufort Delta, receive greater support. This is in addition to support for emergency situations, such as regional support offered most recently in Norman Wells for home heating fuel subsidies. Other measures the Government of the Northwest Territories has taken to support Norman Wells, as well as the Sahtu and Beaufort Delta regions, include providing emergency funding to help businesses, Indigenous governments and community governments offset transportation costs for essential goods, and providing a subsidy to the NTPC to shield all residents from electricity rate increase due to higher diesel costs.

To address rising costs, the government has also indexed the minimum wage to inflation and wage changes, ensuring that residents' incomes better align with increasing expenses.

Given the inflationary pressures, including increasing costs related to food and fuel, that are beyond the government's control, it is important that the government focus on sustainable solutions rather than implementing measures like price controls or fuel tax cuts, which could harm the economy or reduce revenues needed for essential programs.

Continued advocacy and progress on strategic infrastructure projects such as enhancing communication and transportation networks, improving redundancy through initiatives like the Mackenzie Valley Highway and Taltson Hydro Expansion, and the recent completion of the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk fibre line extension, remain key priorities of this government. These efforts, alongside increasing housing availability, aim to address structural factors contributing to high living costs and provide meaningful support to residents across the territory. The GNWT has been working alongside Indigenous governments to strengthen the impact of our advocacy and explore all possible investment opportunities for the North.

I will table later today additional details regarding programs and measures to support residents of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.