

Wendy Bisaro Member Statement and Oral Questions
Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories
ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY
February 8, 2011

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forty years ago Canada initially started its fight against poverty with the founding of the National Poverty Foundation, now called Canada Without Poverty. Forty years ago a special senate committee on poverty published a report, a report which opened with the words, "Poverty is the great social issue of our time. Unless we act now, nationally, in a new and purposeful way, five million Canadians will continue to find life a bleak, bitter and never-ending struggle for survival."

We haven't made much progress on poverty as a country in the last 40 years, Mr. Speaker, and the NWT has contributed to that lack of progress. To date we are one of seven jurisdictions in Canada without a comprehensive Anti-Poverty Strategy. We started to make progress, Mr. Speaker. A motion was passed in this House February 11, 2010, calling for the GNWT to develop an Anti-Poverty Strategy and a definition of poverty. As a result of that motion, the NWT Legislature was lauded by several national anti-poverty organizations. On May 19 last year, the Premier made a statement in the House in which he announced the formation of an anti-poverty working group, a group which, unfortunately, did not include any non-government people.

But in early October of last year, when there was no evidence of any concrete action on the part of this government, an anti-poverty alliance of 21 organizations with some support from this government, held an anti-poverty workshop. Eighty-one participants from throughout the NWT met for two days to discuss the meaning of and solutions for poverty. The result of that workshop was a very thorough and comprehensive report. It was distributed to participants and the government in early December 2010. This report, Mr. Speaker, should be the basis for further work on an Anti-Poverty Strategy. It should be accepted as a starting point for the work the GNWT needs to do. We should not redo work already done. But I recently learned that the GNWT working group composed only of bureaucrats, no non-government representatives, is planning a round of community consultations with a goal of a discussion paper by the end of March this year, and we are preparing to spend \$35,000 to do it.

In my view, it will be a wasted \$35,000. Mr. Speaker, the money would be much better spent acting on the No Place for Poverty report's recommendations. The consultation was done last fall by a group of 81 diverse representatives, 12 percent or so of whom were GNWT staff. Why are we consulting again and why the very short time frame? It seems as though, once again, the government is not listening to its citizens, that it is forging ahead without consideration for the input of our non-government partners. I will have questions for the Premier at a later time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**QUESTION 403-16(5):
ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVES**

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are addressed to the Premier and I'd like to follow up on my statement about the Anti-Poverty Strategy. I want to follow up on the report which went to the government last December from the workshop that was held in October.

I know that there is a GNWT working group that has been established and I also know that it does not include any representatives from outside of government, that there are no representatives from the Anti-Poverty Alliance. I know there is an advisory body but that body is not involved as part of the working group.

So I'd like to ask the Premier why, on the part of the government, why there is this reticence to involve the Anti-Poverty Alliance in developing the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Well, yes, quite simply, Mr. Speaker, the issue comes when in past experience within the Government of the Northwest Territories when we have a large working group together to look at the issues within the North and there are a number of issues that we have examples of, this is one of those, the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The work they've done is good. It was good to get the information together from those that help deliver and deal with those issues on their own. We also, as a Government of the Northwest Territories, deal with those issues and we can't forget that as well, and we need to collect our information, use the work that was done as part of the process. The trouble becomes when there's such a large working group and the recommendations that may come out of that, at times the government then is faced with the ones having to try to fund and put into practice all of those. So that's one of the considerations. We know that the work has been done and it will be a part of the process, because we need to do our work internally, as well, and look at how we deliver the programs from our end to ensure that we are meeting the goals that we're intended to meet. Thank you.

MS. BISARO: Thanks to the Premier. I have to disagree. I think the original Anti-Poverty Alliance is a large group, but it's not all of the members of the Anti-Poverty Alliance who needed to be on the government's working group. They certainly would have been happy with a couple of representatives who were not government members. I think the Premier also suggested that all of the recommendations from the anti-poverty report, the No Place for Poverty report, needed to be accepted by the government and that's not true. I think if the report is read carefully, there are a couple of priorities that the report specifies.

One of the things that I need to ask the Premier is: there is currently a proposal and I think it may have already been started, but there's a plan to go out and to do more

consultation, the community consultations. Those that will be consulted will be invited to consult, it won't be an open invitation to anybody to come. I'd like to know from the Premier why this consultation is needed. The consultation was done last fall, and why do we have to go and consult with specific community people as opposed to anybody in the NWT? Thank you.

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Thank you. The work that we need to do now from a Government of the Northwest Territories side, is we're involved heavily in the field of dealing with the poverty issue in the North with quite a number of departments: the Housing Corporation; Education Culture and Employment; Health and Social Services. We've got quite a number of others, ITI, Justice, in some form or another. So we need to look at our end of the work that's being done and relate that to the work that's been done by the NGOs as well. So the work they've done will help inform the work that we're going to and are doing.

I think the important piece is we've got to do a measurement of what we've done in our day-to-day service as the Government of the Northwest Territories and see how we can bring those together.

MS. BISARO: Thanks to the Premier. I certainly don't deny that the government is heavily involved in programs to try and attack poverty. What's necessary is a crossdepartmental coordination and cooperation among departments, and the silos are still evident. I also don't deny that the government needs to do the work and there needs to be an analysis of what we are doing.

My question to the Premier had to do with the consultation that is presumably about to happen and I'd like to point out to the Premier that there were representatives of the government at that workshop, approximately 12 percent of the people in attendance. I'd like to know if the Premier, based on that information, will reconsider the consultation plan which is apparently ready to go and/or may already be gone. Take the advice of the Anti-Poverty Alliance and move forward from the report instead of doing work already done.

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: The work that was done by the anti-poverty group had a preliminary focus. Yes, the government was involved in the workshop at our request, but quite simply the fact that as the GNWT a number of departments... And yes, the reason that we include Executive, Health and Social Services, Education, Culture and Employment, ITI and Justice as part of the review of this is to knock those silos down and we have to look at the way that we've delivered those programs and come back and correlate that with the work that was done by the NGOs and come out with recommendations that would fit at that point going forward. We've committed to working with the Standing Committee on Social Programs to provide those results as we do that work.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Final supplementary, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the Premier again. I didn't, unfortunately, hear an answer to my question. I do hope that the Premier will reconsider this proposed round of consultation and change it to be more meaningful. I'd like to know from the Premier if this working group and advisory group and whoever else may be involved will be able to give us a definition of poverty prior to September 2011.

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Well, first and foremost, let's not discount our own staff within the Government of the Northwest Territories from having a good level of input and credibility when it comes to this kind of work. It's a mix of all services, whether it's NGOs, but let's not discount the work of our own people that are in the trenches, as well, day to day. I think bringing those two together can help at the end of the day and our goal is to have the work done before the end of the life of this Assembly.