

**15<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly**  
**Third Session**  
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**Public Service Salaries And Benefits**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to use my statement today to once again draw some attention to an item I feel is often overlooked and underestimated.

Seeing as today the Finance Minister delivered his budget address to the Members of this House and the residents of the Northwest Territories, now is as an appropriate time as ever to discuss the largest expense on our books, and that is the salaries and benefits that we pay to our public servants. I do believe we have a very capable and first-rate public service here in the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker. My concern is the size of that public service and the fact that it eats up close to 40 percent of our annual budget.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear! Hear!

**MR. RAMSAY:** This is cause for alarm and for some reason the government doesn't seem to be paying attention to this. We have nearly 4,500 employees in a territory with a population of 42,000 individuals. If you do some math and take out the individuals that are under 20 years of age, you come up with one in every 4.5 people work for the GNWT. The growth goes from 2,750 employees in 1999 to close to 4,500 today. The total costs are up from \$251 million in 1999 to close to \$400 million today.

During the next few months certainly we'll be negotiating with the unions for a new collective agreement. I'm not a fortune teller, Mr. Speaker, but chances are we'll need to pay some more in any new agreement that we get. Where do we suppose this new money is going to come from, Mr. Speaker? What programs and services are going to be affected? What's going to happen here is there's going to be a compounding scenario that's at play and that, if left alone, could cripple the operation of this government at some point in the not too distant future.

Mr. Speaker. I would not wish to send off alarm bells of any kind to the hard working public servants that we do have here in the Northwest Territories, with calls for massive layoffs or anything of that nature. What I feel is needed is a plan, and today there is no plan, Mr. Speaker. We continue to grow our public service every year. In fact, it has almost doubled in size from just six years ago.

What I would suggest to this government is to take stock of where we are today and develop a plan for the future. While the economy is red hot maybe we should look at things like a hiring freeze, early retirement packages and plain old attrition to help us get a handle and grip on where we're headed with our public service.

It is only common sense that the more we are spending on salaries and benefits to our employees, the less money will get on the ground for the people and the social agenda here in the Northwest Territories -- the people who really need some help and the necessities. I'm talking about nurses, teachers and doctors.

We have to know that our priorities are going forward. As a government, we have to get a plan for the future of the public service here in the Northwest Territories to ensure that we're able to continue to provide the programs, services and support that our citizens will demand of us. I find it hard to fathom how any organization could move ahead, with no plan to address this. Mr. Speaker, I guess today I'm sounding the alarm bells. Thank you.