

**16<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly**

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**Initiatives to Address the High Cost of Living**

**Mr. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to use my Member's statement today to continue to talk about the cost of living here in the Northwest Territories.

Yesterday I spoke about how offside the government is with their proposed tax initiatives and how by even discussing increasing the cost of living they are scaring residents and potential residents away. Last winter I heard from many residents who were having a difficult time paying their home heating fuel bills, and now this winter it is going to be 25 per cent more than last winter. I really am worried that coupled with the proposed 19 per cent rate increase for power, residents are going to be buried by utility bills this winter.

In regard to home heating fuel and gasoline, I'm very curious as to what role the government can play in protecting the consumer from what I would view as gouging at the pump and at the fuel truck. When world oil prices fall, residents here in Yellowknife watch enviously as prices of gas at the pump fall by 12 to 15 cents per litre in southern Canada.

Here, for some reason, they stay at levels that just do not seem to make sense to me or to residents. Why are residents here subjected to over-inflated prices? And I do not buy the argument that fuel is stored here and that the supplier paid a certain price for it and now has to sell it at the higher price. If that were true, why is it that when world oil prices rise, the price at the pump rises the next day?

Again, who is protecting the consumer, and is there gouging going on? Watching fuel prices this past year would certainly lead me to believe that gouging is taking place. Why do retailers all sell at the exact same price? Isn't that called price fixing, Mr. Speaker?

We live in a climate where heating our homes is life and death. For starters, the Government of the Northwest Territories should be demanding that the federal government immediately take the 5 per cent GST off of home heating fuel. This would at least provide a little bit of relief for our residents this coming winter.

Mr. Speaker, even though there is a 9.1 cents per litre tax on diesel fuel, there was a period late last winter when diesel fuel, which is essentially the same as home heating fuel, was less per litre at the pump. Residents would have saved money by filling up their diesel vehicle at Circle K and siphoning it into their home fuel tank, saving them some money.

These types of scenarios should never be allowed to exist. Someone should be watching the prices and protecting the consumer. The federal Competition Bureau should be consulted, and I'd like to see an investigation conducted here in the Northwest Territories market communities. Does it really cost 30 cents a litre to transport fuel from Edmonton?

The scary thing for residents here in the North Slave region is that we're building a \$170 million bridge that we don't need with money we don't have, only to charge tolls and make goods like fuel more expensive for residents here in the North Slave. Mahsi.