

16th Legislative Assembly

Fifth Session Third Sitting May 11 - 20, 2010

MAY 19, 2010

Proposed Changes to Supplementary Health Benefits Policy

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak today about the proposed changes to the supplementary health benefits. I'll begin by stating that I am encouraged that Premier Roland and Cabinet Ministers actually were listening to what Regular Members and the public were saying about the proposed changes.

We're looking now at a joint working group formed between Cabinet and Regular Members to come up with a plan to move this forward, and I appreciate Cabinet wanting to work through the issues with Regular Members. I'm hoping for positive results from this effort. In the spirit of consensus government we do need to work together.

However, I do remain sceptical of the timelines. We have an opportunity before us to get this right and make decisions based on solid analysis. As a government we cannot afford to deliver a haphazard, inferior product for our residents. It will be up to us to ensure that it does get done right.

Having the ability to move the implementation date until after Members come back here in October will give us the opportunity to question the Cabinet. For me this is very important, as it will give us the ability to ask more questions on behalf of our constituents. September 30 was solely a political date intended at avoiding another round of questions.

I want to thank those Cabinet Members who agreed with having some flexibility. Over 3,000 Northwest Territories residents signed one petition or another voicing their displeasure with the actions of government in regard to this policy. We had over 150 protesters in front of the Legislative Assembly. A motion passed unanimously in the recent Elders Parliament. A motion passed at the recently held NWTAC. Hundreds and hundreds of e-mails, letters and phone calls from concerned residents. And finally the government has listened.

Politics is a serious business. I recall a former political science professor of mine stating that in politics there are two things you cannot fool around with. The first is health care and the second is education. If you must do so, it will require much finesse and diplomacy. To date we haven't done this. Can we not find a way forward without unnecessarily infuriating the public?

The first step in this process is listening to people. In her handling of the issue, the Health Minister has shown a propensity to be narrow minded and not listen to the arguments put forward by Members on this side of the House, and I want to go on record today as saying she has got to improve her listening skills.

Thankfully some of her Cabinet colleagues understand what consensus government means and what it means to listen to the Regular Members of this House and the public of the Northwest Territories. I want to thank them for that.