

Kelvin Kotchilea's responses to Candidates Questions provided by NWTAC –
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Questions for Federal Candidates 2021 Election

On behalf of the NWT Association of Communities, please accept these questions for Federal Candidates about issues important to communities in the Northwest Territories. We would greatly appreciate your responses by Sept 15, 2021. Please email your answers to info@nwtac.com.

We intend to post the responses to the following questions on our webpage and follow up with the elected Member in the future.

1. In the last budget, the government doubled the gas tax funding for one time, and it was well received. Do you support the permanent doubling of the gas tax fund for 211 communities in Canada?

The federal Gas Tax Fund is important to communities across the country, including those in the NWT, as a permanent source of annual funding flowed through from provinces and territories to municipalities. New Democrats supported the one-time doubling of the fund in Budget 2019 to help address serious municipal infrastructure deficits in municipalities and First Nations communities.

Our vision is one where communities can afford to build the infrastructure they need to thrive, from roads and bridges to community centres and everything in between. New Democrats believe that Canadians should be able to count on the federal government to invest in infrastructure to make a real difference in communities across the country – not to pad the bank accounts of investment firms.

To get there, we will partner with provinces, territories, First Nations and municipalities to deliver reliable public infrastructure funding that puts people – not profit – first. New Democrats will work with provinces and territories to put in place a new deal for rural infrastructure programs that provide long-term predictable funding for communities. A permanent increase to the Gas Tax Fund may well be part of the solution. I would advocate for doubling the Gas Tax Fund if this is what our partners here in the NWT determine will work best for them.

2. Climate change and weather-related emergencies are on the rise in recent years. How will you work with our local governments to increase resiliency to extreme weather events and the effects of climate change?

As the impacts of climate change are felt across the country, New Democrats believe that all levels of government have to step up to help communities cope with the impacts of extreme weather. To make all of Canada’s communities sustainable for the long term, we need to change how we build them.

That’s why a New Democrat government will expand federal funding to respond to disasters, and support communities in proactively adapting their infrastructure to withstand floods, forest fires and other extreme weather events. Northern communities need fair access to federal infrastructure funds, and more help to prepare for and deal with the increasingly severe impacts of climate change. We’ll increase the amount of help the federal government provides to communities to adapt to climate change and rebuild when disasters happen.

We will also partner with Canadians and communities to make serious investments in making buildings more energy efficient, to help families save money and fight climate change.

3. The design of a program to support climate change in the north must be done in consultation with Northerners to be ensure it has uptake and be effective. Will you ensure that any program that is developed on climate change will be in consultation with Northerners?

Absolutely, yes. Any program that is developed to respond to climate change in the north must be done in consultation with Northerners, and I will make sure that happens.

3. Homelessness, mental health and addictions are serious issues in the North. How will your party work to ensure these issues get addressed and solutions developed?

Millions of Canadians are living in poverty and homelessness – and too many of them are people living with disabilities, seniors, veterans, Indigenous people and children. We see this every day on the streets of Yellowknife, and in our smaller communities. Homelessness is often linked to issues of mental health and addictions, and, in the north and elsewhere, to the trauma many Indigenous people suffered through the residential school system and colonization.

New Democrats pledge to build a Canada without poverty, where all Canadians can count on quality public services and community supports to help them lead dignified lives. A core component of our approach is fully implementing the right to housing, and working toward the goal of ending homelessness in Canada within a decade. In a country as wealthy as Canada, there is no excuse to leave any Canadian living in poverty or without a safe roof over their head.

Our affordable housing strategy will include measures to support Canadians at risk of becoming homeless, taking the lead from communities about local needs and adopting a “housing first” approach. To help people find an affordable home in the long term, we will support the creation of more social housing and other affordable options. To deliver help to the most vulnerable right away, we’ll also work with the provinces and municipalities to fast-track the purchase, lease and conversion of hotels and motels for emergency housing relief until more permanent, community-based solutions are available.

Better access to mental health and addictions support will also form a key part of our approach to tackling poverty. In government, New Democrats will commit to working with all levels of government, health experts and Canadians to end the criminalization and stigma of drug addiction, so that people struggling with addiction can get the help they need without fear of arrest, while getting tough on the real criminals - those who traffic in and profit from illegal drugs. We’ll work with the provinces and health professionals to create a safe supply of medically regulated alternatives to toxic street drugs, support overdose prevention sites and expand access to treatment on demand for people struggling with addiction.

Finally, recognizing the need for special supports to address the inter-generational impacts of colonialism and residential schools, a New Democrat government will support and fully fund community-driven solutions for healing, including projects similar to the former “Aboriginal Healing Foundation”.

4. Inadequate housing in terms of both quantity and quality is greatly affecting outcomes for our residents, whether it is in education, health, justice and many other areas. Will your party ensure that long term funding is made a priority, and will you work to find a flexible program that works for our Northern region?

Yes, New Democrats will ensure that long-term funding for housing is made a priority, and we will work to find a flexible program that works for the North.

Nothing is more important than having a place to call home. No matter who you are, you need a safe and affordable place to live and raise your family. But Canadians across the country are facing a housing crisis – and we need a government that gets back to work building new affordable housing to help confront it.

A New Democrat government will partner with provinces and municipalities to create half a million units of affordable housing over the next ten years. This will include social housing, community and non-market housing, as well as assistance for co-ops.

We’ll also streamline the application process and immediately provide dedicated fast-start funds to help communities get the expertise and assistance they need to get projects off the ground now, not years from now. Wherever possible, we’ll encourage provinces and territories

to work with social enterprises to make sure that the training and jobs associated with building affordable housing go to those who need opportunities the most.



We'll also make sure that affordable housing investments go to rural and northern communities, not just big cities— and that federal infrastructure dollars flow now to create good local jobs that stay in the community.

6. It is essential that all communities have access to all telecommunications so they can participate in the digital economy as well as all aspects of digital life. How do you intend to advocate for this essential service to all NWT homes and improve service and reliability for all?

New Democrats are committed to making sure that every community in Canada has access to high-speed internet. Staying connected digitally is more essential than ever, yet too many rural and northern communities in Canada don't have reliable cell phone or broadband service. A New Democrat government will change that, delivering high-speed rural broadband to all communities in Canada without delay.

7. More work needs to be done to ensure cellular coverage along current and future NWT highways. It is a necessity for safety in the North. How will your government support the NWT in this safety requirement?

New Democrats will ensure that the right investments are made to expand cell phone coverage to all parts of the country so that Canadians stay connected – affordably – no matter where they are. I agree that cellular coverage along current and future NWT highways is a necessity for safety in the North, and I will ensure that this requirement is taken into account in our plans.