

Our Time Yellowknife: Just Recovery for the NWT**To:** All MLAs**From:** Our Time - Yellowknife [mailto:greennewdealyk@gmail.com]**Sent:** September 30, 2020 8:23 PM**Subject:** Re: Will you commit to a Just Recovery for the NWT?

I'm writing on behalf of Our Time - Yellowknife, a youth-led volunteer social and climate justice group, and dozens of other individuals and groups, including students, medical professionals, labour unions, Indigenous leaders, and artists. Recent months have brought new challenges for all of us, and we appreciate your leadership in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, we're launching a campaign for a [Just Recovery for the NWT](#), and are calling on you for support.

Many people are eager to go back to 'normal.' But before the pandemic, there were other deep-rooted issues in the Northwest Territories, including rising income inequality, racism, and climate change. As you know, these issues disproportionately affect your constituents who are Black, Indigenous and people of colour, low-income, women and non-binary, youth and Elders, and in many ways have been exacerbated by challenges brought on by COVID. On top of this, NWT mines are nearing the end of their lifespans, making our economic future uncertain. These dramatic changes present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild in a way that enshrines social and climate justice in the Northwest Territories.

Today, we ask that you **publicly commit to implementing a Just Recovery from COVID-19** that includes:

- **Good jobs, paid sick leave, and living wages for all:** Raising the minimum wage to be in line with the living wage, and legislating two weeks of paid sick leave for all.
- **A Guaranteed Liveable Income:** Establishing an income floor below which no one in the NWT is permitted to fall.
- **Affordable housing for all:** Working with Indigenous governments to ensure all residents have access to quality, affordable housing.
- **Universal internet access:** Immediately ensuring that all people have access to quality, affordable Internet and working to provide a long-term public option.
- **Community healing and wellness:** A guarantee that all NWT residents have access to a range of culturally relevant mental health and addictions treatment options both in and away from their home communities.
- **A Green New Deal:** Transitioning away from fossil fuels and transforming the economy with a Green New Deal, or massive investments in low-carbon sectors such as Indigenous Guardians programs, language revitalization, renewable energy, childcare, and Elder care.

You can read more about each demand and see the groups and individuals who support this campaign on the [website](#).

History has shown that significant progress can be born out of moments of crisis, such as the one we're in now. We must take advantage of this time of dramatic change to build a new economy that works against inequality, racism, and the climate crisis - one that isn't so dependent on a few multinational mining corporations. These measures all have the potential to create jobs and address many of the deep-rooted social issues in the territory. 'Normal' wasn't working, and we must build back better.

Will you publicly commit to governing for a Just Recovery that includes these six demands?

If you are inclined, we invite you to share your commitment on social media using #JustRecoveryNWT. We are publicly tracking which MLAs have committed to governing for a Just Recovery on our website, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ellen Gillies
Volunteer Organizer
Our Time – Yellowknife

THIS MOMENT IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENSHRINE JUSTICE FOR THE PEOPLE, LAND & CLIMATE.

The world may be hungry to go back to normal. But before COVID hit, there were other deep-rooted crises in the Northwest Territories, including inequality, racism, & climate change. As young people and allies, we devoted 2019 to organizing for bold, justice- and science-based action to address these systemic realities because countless lives, including ours, depend on it. While the pandemic has shifted the world's attention, these problems have not gone away. **But neither have we.**

As many of us have struggled with a lack of good work, income security, quality housing, Internet access, and mental health and addictions support during the pandemic, the past few months have also shown us how easily governments can put people's needs first. In the NWT, buildings were rapidly repurposed for housing vulnerable groups, low-wage workers' pay was boosted, and evictions were banned, all in a matter of months. On the federal level, billions of dollars came through to support people in need. **It's now clearer than ever that political will, not money, is what has been lacking.**

History has [shown us](#) that moments of crisis, like the one we're in now, can transform societies for the better. This moment presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild in a way that finally puts people, the land, and the climate first. **We call on the GNWT to seize it.**

THIS MOMENT

is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enshrine justice for the people, land and climate of the Northwest Territories.

The world may be hungry to go back to normal. But before COVID hit, there were other crises in the Northwest Territories which haven't gone away: rising income inequality, racism, and climate change, all created over decades by

corporate and political elites in the colonial state of Canada. In a time of unprecedented change, the NWT mines are also nearing the end of their lifespans: our economy is on the brink of something new. **This moment is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to examine if 'normal' was truly working, and how we can rebuild from COVID-19 in a way that finally puts people and the land first.**

As the pandemic has unfolded, these pre-existing crises have been laid bare. **Black, Indigenous and people of colour, people with low incomes, women and non-binary people, youth and Elders have been disproportionately impacted.** Those without good jobs, proper housing, quality Internet, and access to mental health services in the Northwest Territories have been struggling to get by. Many of us are putting ourselves at risk in frontline jobs, while others work safely from home. Meanwhile, the climate crisis hasn't gone away and 2020 has seen worse-than-average flooding in the NWT.

But we've also seen how rapidly people's needs can be put first. After years of delays, major buildings in Yellowknife were repurposed to support those in need. Low-wage workers' pay was boosted, and evictions were banned nearly overnight. Millions of dollars came through to support Indigenous peoples getting out on the land. From waiving Internet overage fees to subsidizing childcare, **this pandemic has made clear that money was never a true limiting factor: it's political will.**

When she took office, Premier Caroline Cochrane committed to making this the 'the most progressive government in NWT history,' and later stated it 'would be a sin' to reverse social supports put in place as part of the pandemic response. But her government is already planning on cancelling many of

these programs, such as the wage top-up program and childcare subsidies for parents. We cannot return to the status quo.

We must take this moment and start building a new economy that works against inequality, racism, and the climate crisis - one that isn't so dependent on a few multinational mining corporations. **We must slash our emissions, create jobs and support our people by investing in low-carbon sectors like childcare, mental health and addictions services, Indigenous Guardians programs, land protection and remediation, Indigenous language revitalization, energy-efficient affordable housing, and community-owned renewable energy.** We must empower and fund our communities to implement their own solutions.

History has [shown us](#) that moments of crisis, like the one we're in now, can transform societies for the better. This moment presents a significant opportunity to rebuild in a way that finally puts people, the land, and the climate first. **How we respond in this moment will have implications for generations to come.**

GOOD JOBS, LIVING WAGES & SICK LEAVE FOR ALL

The NWT has the lowest minimum wage of all the territories, at \$13.46/hour. No one should be expected to live on this in the North, where the living wage is [\\$23.95/hour](#). In addition, many don't have access to paid sick leave, compromising their health & others' if they have to show up to work to pay their bills.

The GNWT must raise the minimum wage to be in line with the living wage, and legislate two weeks of paid sick leave for all.

GUARANTEED LIVEABLE INCOME

Income inequality in the NWT is one of the highest in the country. Too many residents have to deal with paternalistic, bureaucratic income support programs to meet their basic needs. One of the [Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry on MMIWG2S](#), a GLI would establish an income floor below which no one in the NWT would be permitted to fall. In conjunction with other social programs, a GLI would open up new possibilities for those who wish to spend more time caring for loved ones, on the land, growing food, or creating art.

We call on the GNWT to implement a Guaranteed Liveable Income.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL

[The NWT is in a housing crisis](#). Seeing that every person is sheltered in quality housing that meets their needs must be a top priority. Indigenous governments & organizations providing frontline services must be meaningfully consulted & in control of all housing initiatives in their communities. Investing in low-carbon housing is also an opportunity to create local jobs & lower emissions.

The GNWT must work with Indigenous governments to ensure all residents have access to quality, affordable housing.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO INTERNET

Access to free, high-speed Internet is a necessity in normal times, and especially in times of isolation. It is paramount to health, safety and remaining connected in a vast, remote region, yet costs remain high and the speed and quality is low.

The GNWT must immediately ensure that all people have access to quality, affordable Internet and work to provide a long-term public option.

COMMUNITY HEALING AND WELLNESS

Mental health and addictions touch the lives of many across the NWT. Everyone should have access to quality treatment options without having to leave their home community if they prefer to stay close to home. Programs should be community-led, trauma-informed and range between those based in Indigenous methods and Western ones, including on-the-land healing, cultural programming & counselling. Wellness initiatives, such as public spaces designed to foster connection to land, should be supported.

The GNWT must guarantee all NWT residents access to a range of culturally relevant mental health and addictions treatment options both in and away from their home communities.

GREEN NEW DEAL

As the climate crisis worsens and mines close, now is the time for massive public investments to diversify our economy and slash our emissions. We must fund community-owned renewable energy projects, and create education and training

programs that will help the NWT to adapt to climate change while leaving no worker behind. We must invest in other low-carbon sectors like land protection and remediation, Indigenous Guardians programs, early childhood education and care, Elder care and Indigenous language revitalization. Community-driven and Indigenous-led initiatives that meet these goals must be prioritized over all others.

The GNWT must transition away from fossil fuels and transform the economy with a Green New Deal that leaves no worker behind.

MLA RESPONSE TRACKER

Which Members of the Legislative Assembly have publicly committed to governing for a Just Recovery?

MLAs have been e-mailed at least twice for their position since September 10.

If we haven't heard from an MLA by now, we're considering that a refusal to publicly commit to a Just Recovery. This section will be updated as responses are received.

 Ron Bonnetrouge Deh Cho	 Kevin O'Reilly Frame Lake	 Katrina Nokleby Great Slave	 Rj Simpson Hay River North	 Rocky Simpson Hay River South
 Diane Thom Inuvik Boot Lake	 Lesa Semmler Inuvik Twin Lakes	 Caitlin Cleveland Kam Lake	 Frederick Blake Jr. Mackenzie Delta	 Jackson Lafferty Monfwi
 Shane Thompson Nanendeh	 Jackie Jacobson Nunakput	 Caroline Cochrane Range Lake	 Paulie Chinna Sahtu	 Frieda Martseles Thebacha
 Steve Norn Tu-Nehde-Willideh	 Julie Green Yellowknife Centre	 Rylund Johnson Yellowknife North	 Caroline Wawzonek Yellowknife South	
 MLA has publicly committed to governing for the six Just Recovery demands	 MLA has told us privately they are supportive, but has not made a public commitment	 MLA has so far refused to privately or publicly support a Just Recovery		