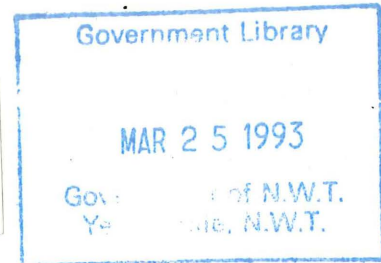


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February 3, 1993

Mr. Ningark,

We believe that the Government's "Long Term Housing Strategy" is misinformed and very poorly thought out. We believe that if the policy is implemented without change, it will severely wound the health and growth of the people and communities that it is supposed to serve.

Not enough work has been done to make this policy viable. The tremendously negative reaction demonstrates that not enough consultation was done. The lack of information that is currently available has made it obvious that the Government was not properly prepared. The reality is that this policy is a huge pill to swallow in a terribly short period of time. In real terms this policy will mean that many people will have to dip into their savings in order to continue to make ends meet each month. Many more will simply not make ends meet.

The policy will force many excellent, long term employees to leave homes where they have made significant contributions to the social fabric of their communities. While it is true that no one is indispensable, the departure of these people will be a severe setback to the Government's programs in health, education, economic development, social services, renewable resources etc. for many years to come. This, at a time when the Government was just beginning to move forward with many of its programs, thanks to the increasingly long-term service of many Government employees.

It means that even in recessionary times, professionals will be far less likely to choose the north as a future home. If professionals in the communities are having trouble with this policy, imagine the anxiety and fear it is causing among the many, many government employees who are in clerk and/or entry level positions. People are being distracted from their daily responsibilities. This policy will be devastating to single parents. More than a few have told me that they will not be able to afford to live here if this policy is implemented. The recession will not last forever. This policy will dissuade prospective employees from entering the civil service.

This policy asks people in the communities to accept housing assessments based upon a Yellowknife model. Why yellowknife? Would you ask people in Moosonee to accept an assessment based upon a Toronto example? When was this assessment done? By whom? Based upon what criteria? "Fair market value" cannot be based upon a Yellowknife standard. This must be determined by local factors.

An employee with many years of experience and a good education should be able to raise a family in the north on one salary. An employee in this position should not have to apply for a "hardship allowance", a demeaning situation that implies a kind of welfare status. This is exactly what will happen if this policy is implemented as is.

During your presentation of this policy in the House of Assembly in December of 1992, you stated that the Government had been working on this strategy for two years. Aside from a very brief survey that we participated in, most people feel that they have not been heard. There are MANY government employees who would like the chance to purchase or lease-to-purchase employer-owned housing. The cost of the units that are for sale should take into account the amount of money that must be spent on a unit in order to bring it "up to spec." The Government should be willing to help its employees secure mortgages that will be structured in a manner that makes home ownership more attractive than renting. Tenants in duplexes should be allowed to purchase their half of the duplex even if the other half has yet to be purchased.

A rent increase of 25% in one year would not be permitted in any other part of Canada, especially in subsidized housing agreements. This rent increase is being perceived as a money-grab on the part of the GNWT in order to deal with a deficit that the Government has allowed to get out of control. This policy is being interpreted by many employees as a "show of force" aimed at impressing the federal housing officials in Ottawa to demonstrate that the GNWT can "get tough" and be worthy of federal housing dollars. The GNWT must amend the Landlord Tenant Act immediately to ensure that tenants will be treated fairly. Tenants should not be treated in such a servile manner.

If implemented, this policy will decimate the "underground economy" in the communities that is supported by disposable income. Carvers, artists, sports groups, churches, volunteer organizations, service clubs, as well as the stores, hotels, restaurants and ALL community-based enterprises will suffer from this depletion of disposable income. Our local Northern Store manager has forecasted a 20% decline in sales this year and is already planning to lay off staff in the near future.

Any new policy should allow long-term GNWT employees to be credited with equity for the many years they have rented from their employers. Employees should have the option of purchasing the furniture that is in their unit, again with some allowance for the time they have "rented" it.

Many employees are asking, why should an employee sink all of their life savings into purchasing a sub-standard and poorly-maintained housing unit when they cannot own the land and do not know if they will ever have a chance to sell it to recover the money they have invested in it? A buy-back policy should be in place for all level two and three communities.


The MLAs should all agree to take a pay-cut equal in percentage to that of the GNWT employees so that they may lead by example.

Any new housing policy should apply to ALL GNWT employees, including Hay Plan, excluded managers, MLAs, Ministers, local hires, and individuals hired at the pleasure of the Cabinet.

In summation, while we believe that many GNWT employees do agree with the basic notion of becoming home owners instead of renters, We believe that most employees want to have much more time and many more options available to them before such a policy is implemented. While we all realize that the Government is under tremendous pressure to deal with the deficit, it should be worth noting that the world's most successful international corporations are those who listen to the grassroots, their employees and customers, not to bureaucrats and theoretic "models". Few would disagree that a new housing policy is long overdue. A well-informed, thoughtfully implemented policy could have a very positive influence on the north. If the current policy is implemented, it may unravel the economic and social fabric of the very communities it is intended to serve.

Mr. Ningark, we have made the North our home for the last eleven years. We have established careers, community commitments, many friends and extended family in this community. This is where we have chosen to raise our children. In short, we have made a LIFE here. We plan to be here for the "long haul". However, this policy is calling our whole future into question. Please help us find a fair and equitable way to continue to make this our home. We would like the proposed housing policy postponed to allow for further input and subsequent amendment. Do we have your support?

Respectfully,

  
William and Helene Belsey

