

**Sessional Statement – December 2019**

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome all my colleagues to this sitting of the Legislative Assembly. I also want to thank them on behalf of Cabinet and myself for selecting us for the Executive Council. You have chosen a hardworking, strong Cabinet that is committed to working collaboratively with Regular Members in the interest of all residents of the Northwest Territories.

I am proud to take my seat here in Canada's first and only gender-balanced legislature. Women make up half of our population and now, half of the representatives in this Assembly. We have a responsibility to serve as a positive example to the rest of the country.

Our ground breaking Cabinet includes four other strong, capable women, in addition to me. In the history of this Assembly since 1999, only three women have ever served on Cabinet before, and they have each served in different Cabinets. In addition to being only the second woman to be Premier since Nellie Cournoyea, I am the first Métis woman to be Premier in all of Canada. Once again, we are making history here in the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

We are also joined by two experienced and capable men at the Cabinet table, who I know are committed to serving the people of this territory. The Executive Council benefits tremendously from the diversity of voices and perspectives we have around the table.

Mr. Speaker, the results of the last election sent a clear message. People voted for change. They did not think that they were being heard and they were not satisfied with the results their government was delivering. We can do better.

We are the servants of the people. Residents of the Northwest Territories have placed their trust in us to represent their interests and make their lives better, now and into the future. We need to listen to what they say, understand what they need and take action to deliver results. It is critical that our focus be outside of this Legislative Assembly. What happens here is important, but whenever possible, the decisions we make should come from the people.

Cabinet must focus on what matters to people when we make decisions. That is why our Cabinet has developed a set of principles to guide us in our decisions to ensure our choices are in the best interest of the residents of the NWT.

Our principles include a commitment to support and enhance relationships with Indigenous governments and Indigenous people. We recognize that we are partners in governing this territory, and if we want to deliver results for our residents, we need to work respectfully with our Indigenous government partners within the true spirit of government to government relationships.

We also recognize that it is more important to produce successful outcomes for people than to apply the same rigid procedures to everyone in every community. That is why our principles ensure that we will choose options that use an integrated, client focused and solution-oriented approach when we are making decisions.

We will work to ensure that our decisions promote personal and community self-sufficiency. We will do this by making sure government policies, programs and services help people and communities define their own needs whenever possible and our work complements their developing their capacity and skills to choose their own futures.

We know that to serve NWT residents, we need to understand and respect their cultures and languages, with a special focus on Indigenous language and culture. To enhance the experiences of people when they are dealing with us and to create a stronger territory, our decisions will respect diversity and embrace all NWT languages and cultures.

We also want to ensure that our decisions create economic and financial benefits for northern residents and businesses. We know that government spending, contracting and procurement creates business and employment opportunities at the community, regional and territorial levels. We are going to keep this in mind when we are making decisions, Mr. Speaker, and make sure our decisions maximize benefits for our territory.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we are going to make it a priority to explain our decisions and the reasons for them, clearly and proactively. We believe people have a right to know and understand what their government is doing, and we are committed to being more open and transparent. Cabinet has to make hard choices sometimes, and we know people won't always like our decisions, but we will explain our decisions and the challenges we face out of respect for the people who elected us to serve them.

In this spirit of respect and transparency, we will be tabling Cabinet's statement of principles today. It is important that the whole of the GNWT understand the principles we will live by.

Mr. Speaker, this is a new government, and we plan on doing business a new way. Our principles are one of those ways. Working more collaboratively with Members is another. There is a wealth of talent and experience in this room and I believe we are all committed to making a difference for our people.

Fostering relationships outside this room will also be a priority for us. The GNWT does not govern alone, and we need the support and participation of many partners to achieve success. I have already reached out personally to Indigenous leaders in the territory, and we will start face to face meetings in the New Year.

I have also recently returned from Ontario, where I took part in meetings of Canada's Premiers, met with the Prime Minister and federal Ministers and attended the opening of Parliament. I am pleased to say that the North has a lot of support in the South and the three territorial Premiers were successful in getting the support of our provincial colleagues to make Northern priorities one of the four agenda items for the next First Ministers Meeting.

Following our meetings in Ottawa I am confident that the Prime Minister and Federal Ministers share our goal of creating a strong, prosperous Northwest Territories. I look forward to working closely with them as we finalize plans for both of our governments.

In conclusion, Cabinet looks forward to working closely with all Members of the Legislative Assembly, as well as all levels of government as we move forward the priorities defined by the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.