

Fostering Indigenous Languages

Mr. Speaker, I stand in this House today to celebrate the nine official Indigenous languages of the Northwest Territories. How incredible that we have nine official Indigenous languages, unlike any other jurisdiction in Canada. Our languages are gifts to be protected, strengthened, valued and promoted.

Mr. Speaker, it is our responsibility to keep our languages alive, to ensure we are a Territory where Indigenous languages are supported, respected, and where they thrive. This is the vision that gives me hope, that gives us the energy and the drive to revitalize our languages, and that will help us ensure that our children and our youth retain a strong connection to their language and to who they are.

Mr. Speaker, each of our Indigenous languages: Chipewyan, Tłıchǫ, South Slavey, North Slavey, Gwich'in, Cree, Inuvialuktun, Inuuinaqtun and Inuktitut, articulate the ways of knowing, doing, being and believing that are unique to their own communities and history. They define who we are as people of the Northwest Territories.

Indigenous languages are the essence of our identity, our people and our culture. Our Indigenous languages remind us of our relationships with each other, the land and the spiritual world. It is through the oral traditions, legends and stories of our ancestors, Elders, and knowledge keepers that we come to understand the history, geography and ecology of this land. These stories remind us to work together through consensus and collaboration, which is the basis of how we govern here in the Northwest Territories. Our languages benefit all of our residents.

Mr. Speaker, I am one of the countless Indigenous people who never acquired the language that was spoken by my ancestors since time immemorial, so I understand the importance

of fostering Indigenous languages, and commit this government to do so through the many revitalization initiatives currently in place, and those planned for the future.

Mr. Speaker, February is Indigenous Languages Month in the Northwest Territories, and I am proud to be a part of a territory that acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of language, and the rich culture of its peoples. The theme of this year's celebration is Say It With Me. This is a call to action that focuses on the importance of using Indigenous languages at home, at school, in the media, at work and in the community. These are the words of encouragement that the next generation of speakers needs to hear to increase the presence and value of Indigenous languages.

This month, we are supporting regional Indigenous governments to celebrate Indigenous Languages Month through community activities and events. As a government, we are also celebrating the bilingual Government of the Northwest Territories employees who provide important government services to the public in Indigenous languages.

Next month, we will continue these celebrations by honouring 14 students graduating from Aurora College with the University of Victoria's Certificate in Indigenous Language Revitalization.

Mr. Speaker, there are many exciting Indigenous language revitalization initiatives underway right now within the territory, we have:

- awarded 29 Indigenous Languages Revitalization Scholarships to postsecondary students in programs focused on Indigenous languages,
- piloted the Northwest Territories Indigenous Languages Mentor-Apprentice Program in partnership with three regional Indigenous governments which is helping 60 community participants build language fluency,
- delivered training for 20 Community Indigenous Language Instructors to support capacity building and give communities the tools they need to keep the languages vibrant and strong,
- provided training for over 100 Indigenous language teachers in instructional strategies and resources to use in school programs, and

- we will be launching the new JK-12 Our Languages curriculum in our schools beginning in the 2020-2021 school year.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the work that we have done to support Indigenous languages. Recently, on an education tour, I saw a wonderful example of this in action when I came across an Indigenous Language scramble game. This game started as a project created by students at Paul William Kaeser High School in Fort Smith who kick started the creation of a Chipewyan Scramble game. This 'student created' Indigenous language teaching tool became so popular that the South Slave Divisional Education Council invested in its commercial production, printing copies and distributing them to schools throughout the South Slave. It was not long before other school divisions began asking for copies in other Indigenous languages. In response, the game was redesigned to accommodate additional languages, and hundreds of copies have now been distributed to schools and libraries throughout the North with the hope that children, parents, and grandparents come together to explore their language through a fun and exciting family activity.

Mahsi cho to the Elders, community leaders, language advocates, and teachers who continue to promote Indigenous language revitalization efforts across the Northwest Territories. Mahsi cho to all the language learners who have the courage to Say It With Me in the Indigenous languages of the Northwest Territories. Most importantly, I want to encourage our young leaders and adult learners to take up the torch and become the new champions of Indigenous language revitalization across the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.