

February 2019 Sessional Statement

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome Members back for the continuation of the Third Session of the Legislative Assembly.

We are now into the final months of the 18th Legislative Assembly, and Ministers and Members have been working hard together to create a better territory for our residents, one in which all people have the support and opportunities they need to be healthy and economically secure, while maintaining their connection to a sustainable and well-managed environment.

I want to recognize everyone in this House for their efforts and their commitment to advancing our work on behalf of Northwest Territories residents over the past three years. We have achieved a lot already by working together and working with other governments, including the Government of Canada, and Indigenous and community governments.

Last November, Mr. Speaker, our government was pleased to sign an agreement with the Government of Canada that will help us address housing needs across the Northwest Territories.

The \$140 million dollar bilateral agreement on implementing the National Housing Strategy in the Northwest Territories will see Canada invest \$90 million dollars in this territory, while the GNWT will contribute another \$50 million dollars over a ten-year period.

Beginning this April, this funding will protect, renew and expand social and community housing, and support the Northwest Territories' priorities related to housing repair, construction, and affordability. Our governments have also agreed to work together on the design and implementation of a new Canada Housing Benefit for the territory, to provide affordability support directly to families and individuals in housing need.

The GNWT has also negotiated a \$60 million dollar carve out with the Government of Canada, Mr. Speaker, to advance innovative, community-driven housing solutions in the Northwest Territories under the National Housing Co-Investment Fund. Projects under this fund will build and repair community and affordable housing in the Northwest Territories and will be 75 percent cost-shared with Canada.

I know housing remains a priority for all Members and their constituents, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased that we are now in a position to meaningfully address those needs with Canada.

Our government also continues to work with community governments to develop community housing plans. These plans will provide communities and their stakeholders with the tools to direct the future of housing in their communities. We are currently engaged in this process with Deline, Fort Liard, Jean Marie River, Paulatuk, Whati and the K'at'odeeche First Nation. Once developed, these plans will provide housing investors, including all levels of government, with the information they need to invest in community housing infrastructure.

Supporting our residents to be healthy and educated is another priority for our government that I know Members share with us, Mr. Speaker, and we continue to deliver and improve on programs, services and supports Northerners need.

Addressing mental health and addictions remains a priority for us, and last month our government was pleased to announce a \$1.8 million dollar investment over three years for cannabis education. Through funding provided under Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program, the GNWT will develop and deliver a comprehensive and interactive cannabis public education campaign.

This campaign will use traditional media and social media platforms, augmented reality, community-led engagement sessions and other innovative public education tools to bring health and safety information to communities across the territory and help individuals make informed decisions about cannabis use.

We were also pleased last month to announce an agreement with the Government of Canada to invest over \$750,000 dollars to support the opioid addiction treatment program in the Northwest Territories. This additional funding will let the GNWT extend the opioid treatment clinic, currently only available in Yellowknife, to other communities in the territory.

Along with addressing the health and shelter needs of Northwest Territories residents, Mr. Speaker, our government continues to invest in education and skills development so Northerners are able to acquire skills and training to get the jobs they want here in the Northwest Territories.

As part of our commitment in this area, the Government of the Northwest Territories was pleased to open the new \$10 million dollar Centre for Mine and Industry Training at the Thebacha Campus of Aurora College in Fort Smith along with the Government of Canada last month.

With \$4 million dollars coming from Canada and \$6 million from the GNWT, this new facility will allow Aurora College to develop new and innovative programs to support training of Northern residents. Programs that will be supported include heavy equipment operator training, introduction to the mining industry, surface miner, mineral processing operator trainee, introduction to underground mining, underground miner and diamond driller.

Training Northwest Territories residents for in-demand careers that are available here in the North remains a priority for our government and is a key to our Skills 4 Success plan, which aims to align educational opportunities to labour market needs in our regions and communities.

The combination of classroom and hands-on training the new centre will provide will not only make Northwest Territories graduates more competitive, but will also become more important as the GNWT continues with plans to transition Aurora College to a polytechnic university.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we need to keep up our end of the bargain. We encourage our youth to stay in school, and government has a responsibility to make sure that there are good jobs available for them when they get out.

We want our young people to settle down here at home, start families and contribute to the ongoing growth and prosperity of the Northwest Territories.

People will not live where there are no jobs or opportunities for them, and that is why the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to invest in economic growth and diversification, including investments in infrastructure that will transform the economy of the Northwest Territories for the long term.

Part of keeping that commitment includes investing in local economic diversification, such as the new Hay River fish plant our government announced last month, with support from the Government of Canada.

This project is one of the keys in the GNWT's strategy to rejuvenate the Great Slave Lake fishery and restore its contribution to a diversified local and territorial economy. Through a partnership with the NWT Fishermen's Federation and their Tu Cho Cooperative, we look forward to transforming the existing fishery and expanding its scope to supply domestic, commercial and export markets with Great Slave Lake fish and fish products.

Our government's investment in Marine Transportation Services is also contributing to economic diversification in the territory, with three major projects being undertaken at our MTS shipyard in Hay River. These large maintenance and overhaul projects for our own vessels and contract work for the Canadian Coast Guard, scheduled for January to August 2019, will provide off-season employment for 30 MTS employees and another four specialized trades contractors at peak periods of work.

Resource development has traditionally been the foundation of the Northwest Territories economy and, in 2017, accounted for 32 percent of the Northwest Territories economy.

Much of that economic activity has been due to the diamond mines, but the Northwest Territories is about more than diamonds. We are seeing new and renewed exploration

activity in so-called “green” or “technology” metals and minerals like copper and cobalt, as well as rare earth elements, lithium and graphite. We are also seeing a resurgence of interest in the gold and base metals that established our territory.

We also have world-class reserves of natural gas that, as we begin to see a shift to lower-carbon alternatives nationally and internationally, has the potential to meet market needs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

At the same time, lack of infrastructure, including infrastructure for transporting our resources to market is one of the biggest challenges to economic development the NWT faces, and this is why we have made investing in this area a priority.

We continue to make progress on the Mackenzie Valley Highway following last June’s announcement of another \$140 million in combined funding from the Government of Canada and the GNWT. This project will connect several communities to the public highway system and create economic opportunities, such as increased tourism and access for resource development. Work currently underway includes the Great Bear River Bridge, the Wrigley to Mount Gaudet access road and planning and environmental studies that will lead to obtaining permits for road construction.

We are also making progress on the Tlicho All Season Road, with Canada providing 25 percent of the funding for this P3 project. North Star Infrastructure was announced as the preferred proponent last November, and we were pleased to learn that the Tlicho Government is considering taking an equity position in the project shortly after that. Construction of this 97-kilometre road is expected to begin in the fall of 2019, subject to regulatory approvals.

Construction of an all-weather road into the Slave Geological Province would address the lack of access to the world-class mineral deposits located in the region and help attract further investment by lowering the cost of mineral exploration and development. We currently have a funding application to advance this project in with the federal government and look forward to hearing good news about it soon.

The high cost of energy, particularly for remote off-road projects, is one of the biggest challenges to resource development in the territory. Addressing this need will not only improve prospects for economic development, but also provides an opportunity for greening the mining industry.

Our government and the Government of Canada made a major step in this direction last month when we announced over \$1.2 million in combined investments to advance the Taltson Hydroelectricity Expansion project. These investments will support Indigenous engagement and fund initial engineering work.

The Taltson project will transform the NWT's energy system, providing current and future industry with clean and renewable energy, driving economic growth and mitigating a major source of the territory's GHG emissions.

A significant portion of the funding announced will go to the Akaitcho Territory Government, Northwest Territories Metis Nation and Salt River First Nation to establish their business model frameworks to actively participate in the development of the project.

Indigenous participation and partnership in the Taltson Expansion project will ensure Northwest Territories Indigenous governments and their people will benefit meaningfully from this development, including new revenues, access to jobs and business opportunities, and help ending their reliance on diesel to power their communities.

I want to recognize Canada's Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Northern Affairs and Internal Trade Dominic LeBlanc for his leadership in advancing Taltson with his federal colleagues. We expect last month's announcement was just the beginning for this important project and look forward to hearing more good news from Canada on significantly more funding for the Taltson Expansion project in budget 2019.

The investment in Taltson also reflects our shared commitment with the Government of Canada to address the high cost of living in the Northwest Territories and transition towards lower-carbon energy options.

Expanding the Taltson Hydroelectric facility will increase the availability of clean, renewable energy to help the Northwest Territories reduce its reliance on diesel, helping to reduce the cost of living for our residents and allowing the territory to meet its commitments under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.

Advancing Taltson supports key components under the 2030 Energy Strategy, which has been developed to guide the development of secure, affordable, and sustainable energy for transportation, heat and electricity, support energy efficiency and conservation, and promote renewable and alternative energy solutions.

While the potential benefits of Taltson are still several years away, the GNWT and Canada are also addressing more immediate energy needs. Last October, we were pleased to announce the investment of \$23 million under the Low Carbon Energy Leadership Fund for a number of initiatives that will support implementation of the GNWT's 2030 Energy Strategy, including energy retrofits for public housing, energy retrofits for marine transportation vessels and ferries, and active forestry carbon sequestration.

This funding will also support a four-year \$1.8 million dollar government greenhouse gas grant program designed to support emissions reduction projects and initiatives undertaken by Northwest Territories community governments, municipalities and Indigenous governments.

The Low Carbon Energy Leadership Fund investment is also being used to enhance programming offered by the Arctic Energy Alliance and to introduce new programs, including support for energy upgrades for owners of older, less efficient homes and low-income home owners. Funding will also be available to support NGOs for energy retrofits.

Mr. Speaker, the upcoming sitting will be a busy one. We have a lot of work on our table, including consideration of the 2019-2020 Main Estimates and important new legislation to support the responsible management of Northwest Territories land, environment and resources, protect the health of our residents and support their education.

While this looks like a lot, it is important to remember that we have already accomplished a lot as Members of the 18th Legislative Assembly. We have already demonstrated that we

can do good work together. Let's build on this success and our commitment to working together on behalf of the people of the Northwest Territories as we embark on our final budget session together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.