

**Progress in Postsecondary Education**

Mr. Speaker, we are making significant progress in meeting this government's mandate commitments to strengthen the Northwest Territories postsecondary education system.

I am pleased to advise that the drafting of legislation to govern postsecondary education in the NWT is nearing completion. The proposed legislation will create, for the first time, a process to ensure the effective governance and quality assurance of all postsecondary institutions operating in the territory.

This fulfills our mandate commitment to develop legislation ensuring a quality assurance system by which postsecondary institutions will be recognized in the NWT. This also contributes to our mandate commitment to develop and foster our knowledge economy. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment continues to work with our postsecondary partners to support the development and growth of postsecondary institutions and programs in the NWT, the proposed legislation will also support Aurora College's transformation into a polytechnic university, including the creation of a new governance model and its own degree-level programs.

Mr. Speaker, we have a great opportunity to transform post-secondary education for the long-term. This will provide opportunities here in the territory for residents to get the skills and training they need for NWT jobs today, and in the future.

A polytechnic university combines the practical approach of a college education and the depth of study usually associated with a university program. Polytechnic programs are skills-intensive, technology-based and hands-on, providing students with practical training for in-demand jobs. Program and curriculum decisions at polytechnic universities are also

made in close collaboration with representatives from industry, ensuring graduates achieve skills that are relevant to the current job market.

Since tabling the Government Response to the Aurora College Foundational Review, I have traveled to the three campus communities of Inuvik, Fort Smith and Yellowknife. I have met with Indigenous and community leaders, Aurora College staff, more than 100 college students and more than 200 members of the public in the three communities.

Mr. Speaker, there is overall excitement for the transformation of Aurora College. The Mayors of all three campus communities have sent a joint letter confirming their collective support of the polytechnic university and recognizing the academic, social and economic advantages it will provide for all northerners.

A polytechnic university with three vibrant campuses and 21 community learning centres will give residents access to more educational options, closer to home. It will improve employment success for residents, help close skill gaps for in-demand jobs, and better respond to employer, industry and community needs in the Northwest Territories. It creates a platform to grow our knowledge economy, including increased retention of research funding and increased influence over northern research priorities.

The new \$10 million Aurora College Centre for Mine and Industry Training in Fort Smith and the planned Arts, Crafts and Technology Centre in Inuvik are two examples of what we can achieve through strategic partnerships with governments and industry. The Government of the Northwest Territories has been, and remains committed to, investing in postsecondary education for northerners, but we must be making strategic and informed decisions as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, we know the next steps for 2019 and we remain on track to meet our long-term goal of a polytechnic university. It is critical we get this right by making decisions in the right order and at the right time. The strengthening and growth of our postsecondary

education system must begin with a clear vision and a strong Associate Deputy Minister to lead Aurora College and oversee the design and implementation of changes over the coming months and years. I am pleased to welcome (starting March 4) Dr. Tom Weegar as our new Associate Deputy Minister of Postsecondary Education Renewal.

That vision will be informed by the people of the Northwest Territories. All residents will have the opportunity to provide their thoughts and ideas on the strengths, challenges and opportunities in our postsecondary education system. This input will be used to define the territorial vision and goals for the future and guide the development of a Postsecondary Education Framework. The Framework will provide a clear picture of what we will achieve and how we will work together with our stakeholders and partners.

Our next step is to establish the Advisory Committee and Academic Advisory Council to bring together experts from across the territory and the country to ensure we follow national standards and best practices in all areas.

Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of work ahead, but the opportunities we create will generate wide-ranging social and economic benefits and greatly advance what we can achieve as a territory.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.