

Sessional Statement

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome all Members back to the continuation of the Second Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. I am looking forward to hearing from all Members during this brief sitting as we continue our work together to create a strong and sustainable future for the people of this territory.

Settling land claims is essential for creating this future for the Northwest Territories. Settled claims both advance reconciliation with Indigenous communities and create the foundation for social development and economic growth that can generate benefits for Indigenous people and all Canadians.

That is why it is so important for this Legislative Assembly to succeed at its priority of advancing, finalizing and implementing land, resources and self-government agreements and that is why I have also made settling outstanding claims during the life of this Legislative Assembly a personal priority.

Our government has made a commitment in its mandate to work to resolve outstanding claims with the Akaitcho, Dehcho, NWT Metis Nation and Acho Dene Koe.

We continue to make real progress at many tables, including in Tulita, where negotiators recently initialled a Self-government Agreement-in-Principle. Other tables, however, have encountered issues that have slowed progress. Our government wants to change that and we have taken steps we hope will ensure residents of regions like the Akaitcho, Dehcho and South Slave are able to enjoy the benefits that settled claims are providing in other regions.

To help us advance negotiations in these regions, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Carolyn Bennett and I appointed two Ministerial Special Representatives last year. The MSRs – one for the South Slave and one for the Dehcho – were mandated to speak to all parties to the negotiations and report back to us on current challenges and make recommendations for resolving them.

On April 5th, Minister Bennett and I met in Ottawa with leaders from the Dehcho, the Akaitcho and the NWT Metis Nation to discuss the reports of the MSRs and their recommendations. I am hopeful that the work of the MSRs will give all parties a path forward and lead to the resolution of these longstanding claims.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to settling these claims by taking innovative, flexible approaches that will result in fair and equitable agreements in these regions. I expect to update Members further on this issue during this sitting.

A predictable, efficient and integrated system for making decisions about land use and development that reflects the interests and priorities of Northerners is another essential building block for a strong and sustainable future, Mr. Speaker.

Our government has made a commitment in its mandate to evolve our legislative, regulatory and policy systems in order to advance the territorial vision of land and resource management in accordance with the Land Use and Sustainability Framework. Reviewing, updating and modernizing this territory's land and natural resource legislation will be an important part of this work.

We have long held that decisions that influence our territory's economy and environment are better guided and managed by the people who live here. The devolution of authorities over public lands, water and resources gave this Legislative Assembly the power to update, align and create new legislation for our territory.

Over the next several years, the GNWT will be updating legislation and regulations in the areas of mining, land administration, parks, oil and gas, water and environmental protection. We will be seeking input from Members, the public and stakeholders, who will have multiple opportunities to shape and influence our work so it best meets the needs and priorities of the Northwest Territories.

Through these updates, we will create a made-in-the-Northwest Territories legislative model that ensures sustainable, responsible development, while respecting the rights of Indigenous people and the agreements we have reached with them.

Members will begin to see some of this work later in this session when the government introduces proposed amendments to the *Environmental Protection Act*. Work in this area will continue throughout the term of our four-year mandate as the Ministers of Lands; Environment and Natural Resources; and Industry, Tourism and Investment develop and bring forward proposed amendments to several acts in the coming years.

The Government of the Northwest Territories continues to make progress on the mandate adopted by the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Of 200 commitments made by this government, 153 are in progress, seven are being planned and 40 have been fulfilled.

Among the accomplishments guided by the mandate are investments and funding in areas like: infrastructure projects, film and the arts, family violence shelters, early childhood programs and local housing organizations.

Several strategies and implementation plans have also been completed under the mandate, including: agriculture and commercial fisheries strategies, the recreational leasing management framework, the Skills 4 Success Action Plan and a strategic framework for mental health and addictions. We have also contributed to the development of the Canadian Energy Strategy and the Pan-Canadian Task Force on Reducing Diesel. To increase the number of women running for elected office, we have held our first campaign schools in Hay River and Inuvik and are currently evaluating our approach.

The mandate has also guided work to develop and expand programming in all the priority areas of the Legislative Assembly, including governance; cost of living; education, training and youth development; community wellness and safety; and economy, environment and climate change.

The mandate was meant to guide the work of the Government of the Northwest Territories throughout the four-year term of the 18th Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker, several initiatives are on the horizon, and I am confident that we remain on track to fulfill our commitments by late 2019. I plan to table a report later in this sitting that will provide Members with a more complete update on the status of our mandate commitments to date.

While the mandate is the primary guiding document of our government, Mr. Speaker, we cannot ignore the need to act when circumstances demand it or fail to take advantage of

opportunities to address other longstanding needs of NWT residents. The mandate also does not eliminate our obligation to carry on the typically expected planning and management work that any government must conduct.

Some of that extra work has been thrust upon our government by federal priorities, including work toward the implementation of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change and the development of a Pan-Territorial Sustainable Development Strategy. Work to support the legalization of cannabis and negotiation of a new health care funding agreement has also been driven by federal priorities.

Responding to emerging needs of NWT residents where we are able has led us to begin work on establishing a territorial 9-1-1 service, and ground ambulance and highway rescue services. We have worked toward developing a youth community wellness pilot program in Fort Good Hope and to increase the Senior Home Heating Subsidy and Senior Citizen Supplementary Benefit.

Our government also stepped in when it became clear that there would be no commercial replacement for the marine shipping service of the former Northern Transportation Company Limited. This service provided an essential link to several small communities that would have been left with no affordable alternatives for receiving fuel, building materials and other essential dry goods without our intervention.

Mr. Speaker, this sitting will be our last before we begin the review of the mandate as required by our Process Convention on Priority Setting. That review will be an important opportunity for us to make sure that the mandate set near the beginning of our term still reflects our shared priorities and the needs of Northwest Territories residents.

I look forward to hearing from and meeting with Members over the coming months as we consider whether our priorities have shifted, whether there are new challenges to be addressed and what we can reasonably expect to accomplish together in the remaining two years of this Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.