

Sessional Statement

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome all Members back to the continuation of the Third Session of the 18th Legislative Assembly. As we near the end of our term, our government continues to focus on advancing the priorities of the Assembly and fulfilling remaining mandate items. These are intended to help create a better future for all residents of the Northwest Territories, including the advancement of outstanding claims and self-government negotiations.

For almost four years, Mr. Speaker, our Government has put a great deal of effort into raising the profile of the Northwest Territories at the national level. Our territory does not exist in isolation, and the choices and decisions of other governments in neighbouring provinces and territories, and at the federal level, can have a significant impact on what happens here at home.

Last week I was in Ottawa with Tłıchq Grand Chief George Mackenzie to appear before the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs in support of Bill C-88. This bill seeks to advance numerous amendments to the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*. These were first passed as part of the federal legislation that established devolution, and include the continuation of regional land and water boards as established in the land claims.

Passage of this bill will help ensure our residents have the tools and legislative authority needed to effectively make decisions about responsible resource development and increase certainty. Coming together to speak up on behalf of the Northwest Territories when important decisions like this are pending is one way we are having a real impact on national affairs.

We have been successful at putting the Northwest Territories on the national agenda and leveraging that attention for investments in territorial priorities throughout the term of this Assembly. Most recently, that has included commitments in the last federal budget to invest \$18 million over three years in the Taltson Hydro Expansion project, and \$5.1 million for planning and surveys to support the development of the Slave Geological Province Corridor.

Effective cooperation and partnerships with our provincial and territorial counterparts has been another important part of how we have placed, and kept, the North on the national agenda. My colleagues on the Council of Federation were particularly effective, for instance, in helping secure special recognition for the unique challenges that the three Northern territories face as part of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.

While we have achieved a lot, we cannot take our achievements for granted. Recent months have seen significant turnover among Premiers across the country, and we are all aware that there is a federal election this fall.

In this climate of change, it will be more important than ever to educate and engage governments at all levels so we can ensure the North continues to be a priority on the national agenda.

But our efforts should not end there. We also need to start thinking globally, not just nationally.

The Arctic has always been an important symbol for Canada, a geographic statement of our place and status in the world as a Northern power.

Unfortunately, Canada's interest in and attention to the Arctic has often been symbolic at best. Generations of southern Canadians and their governments have grown used to thinking of the North as a vast and inaccessible place valued most for its emptiness.

This, however, is not a view of the Arctic shared by other nations.

In recent years, I have spent a great deal of time making connections with other leaders and promoting the Northwest Territories. I can tell you from the conversations that I have been having that interest in the Arctic is immense.

Canada is alone when it comes to inaction in the Arctic.

China and Russia, for instance, see enormous opportunity in the Arctic. They are moving fast to ramp up their presence and level of activity within their borders, and across the circumpolar world. This is an effort to both secure opportunities for themselves and to influence the international rules and policies that will set the terms for what happens in the Arctic.

Russia sees the Northern Sea Route as an essential maritime opening for its country. Russia has a fleet of 20 icebreakers capable of traversing the Northern Sea Route, more than a dozen ports including two deep water ports in their Arctic and have committed to increasing investments to attract more shipping traffic through the Northern Sea Route.

China released a whitepaper on its Arctic strategy last year, is investing heavily in infrastructure around the world and certainly has its eye on Arctic shipping and research. They were recently in discussions with Greenland about investing in three airport projects and have their own nuclear icebreaker under construction. They have one polar research vessel in service and a second one expected to enter service this year.

Despite the 1998 Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on Arctic Cooperation, the United States has started to renew

assertions that the Northwest Passage is an international waterway, rather than internal Canadian waters. New legislation proposed by Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, the *Arctic Policy Act*, and the *Shipping and Environmental Leadership Act*, may be seen as a renewed will in the US to set the terms for the Arctic.

In the face of this international activity, I think it only makes sense to ask: “where is Canada”? Does Canada want to remain a leader in the Arctic? What is Canada’s Vision for the Arctic? What is Canada prepared to do to make sure it has a real say in setting the terms of engagement for all nations?

I also think it makes sense that residents of Canada’s three Northern territories have a leading say in determining Canada’s plan for the Arctic. We are the ones who live here. We are the ones who are repeatedly affected when decisions are made for us, rather than with us. We are an obvious partner for Canada when they begin to discuss what should happen next.

As international interest and activity in the Arctic accelerates it is important that Canada is not left behind. There are some clear areas where Canada can concentrate its focus and attention.

Positioning Canada’s northern territories as a hub for trade and transportation is one of these.

The circumpolar route can cut as much as 20 days off the time it takes to reach Asia from Europe via ship. Other countries know this and they have already been making moves to secure control over these routes, both through their active use and by advancing claims over their status as national or international channels.

Canada’s North is closer to key markets in all the major global trading blocs, including Europe, Asia and Russia than most other regions of North America. It would be a shorter trip from Yellowknife to Moscow, than it would be from Toronto. We are also closer to European centres like Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen and Helsinki.

Heading east, a 10,000 kilometer plus trip from Toronto to Tokyo or Beijing would be less than 8,000 kilometers from Yellowknife.

Canada should be leveraging this comparative proximity to these international markets and investing significantly in transportation infrastructure in all three northern territories. Growing and expanding territorial airports can make them a major trans-shipment point for goods moving between Asia, North America and Europe, especially if there is supporting investment in connecting infrastructure like roads and railways linking us to southern Canada.

Similarly, investments in deep water ports and marine facilities along Canada’s Arctic coast can help to capture trade already travelling the polar route and which is sure to increase in coming years, as well as tourist and scientific traffic that is also sure to grow.

Another area Canada will need to look at as it considers what it wants to achieve in the Arctic in coming years is its physical presence. Simply put, Canada needs to *be in the Arctic*, if it wants to have a say in what happens in the Arctic.

Economies are driven and sustained by people, and Canada is very much lagging in this regard. It is hard to achieve the economies of scale that can truly drive growth and prosperity when our population is a sliver of the population in the rest of the circumpolar world.

Our small population also limits our ability to effectively monitor activity in the Arctic. How effectively can Canada monitor the Arctic coastline and shipping passages with only a single Coast Guard station in Iqaluit, and search and rescue resources located at southern military bases?

How long will it take Canada to even learn of a maritime or environmental incident, and then effectively respond to and manage it? What effect would such a delay have on the Arctic, its people and its environment?

Finally, Canada needs to *know the Arctic*, not just know about it, if it wants to have a meaningful say in decisions about the Arctic in coming decades.

As a northern nation, Canada should make it a priority to ensure that more of its citizens have an opportunity to experience the Arctic and learn what it really means to be “northern”. Policy and decision makers need to have experience in and understand the territories, where they can gain the direct, first-hand knowledge and experience to make good evidence, based decisions.

Knowing the Arctic also means significantly ramping up Canada’s scientific research capacity and Arctic academic infrastructure. If Canada wants to understand how climate change affects the North and how to adapt to it, we need significant investment in scientific research programs and facilities to support that. If we want thriving territorial economies, it only makes sense to educate the next generation of business and civic leaders here, including professionals like doctors and lawyers who will support communities.

We must lead the conversation to determine what Canada wants for the Arctic. We must also lead the conversations about establishing and implementing Canada’s Arctic priorities. As the world attention continues to shift towards the actions and politics of the circumpolar north, Canada’s need for a meaningful Arctic Plan is only going to become more important. With the Arctic figuring ever more prominently in the plans of other global powers, we need to know that Canada has a plan. Territorial residents will need to be confident that their priorities are found in this plan and that it will benefit them.

Northerners setting the terms for the North has been a significant priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories for years. Devolution was all about Northerners being able to make their own decisions about how the land, environment and resources of the Northwest Territories are managed.

Our government continues to pursue this priority in the 18th Legislative Assembly with a number of proposed bills that improve on the legislative authorities for managing land and resources that were transferred from Canada at the time of devolution. These include the *Mineral Resources Act*, *Environmental Rights Act*, *Protected Areas Act*, *Public Lands Act*, *Petroleum Resources Act*, *Oil and Gas Operations Act*, and *Environmental Rights Act*.

Defining the future of the Arctic and Canada's three northern territories will require a bold vision and an ambitious plan. Northerners need to have a role in shaping that plan. The upcoming federal and territorial elections provide us with an opportunity to continue a broad conversation about the long-term future of the North. This work to advocate for the people of the territory will build on what we have achieved during the life of this Assembly.

I look forward to continuing that advocacy and to working with all Members in our remaining months here to help make the North a priority for Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.