

The Honourable Bob McLeod
Premier

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August 2019 Sessional Statement

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome my colleagues back for the final sitting of the 18th Legislative Assembly.

The past four years have been busy and we have done a lot of good work together. We have also had a few spirited discussions about how to decide what is best for the people that we serve as Members of this Assembly.

Throughout our term, our decisions have been guided by the Mandate we adopted unanimously at the beginning of this Assembly and revised in October 2017.

As we come to the close of this Assembly, I am pleased to report that through our work together, we have fulfilled 202 of the 230 Mandate commitments. We have another 10 commitments currently in progress that we expect to complete by the end of this month, for a total of 212 completed commitments.

Our commitments were organized into five categories that matched the priorities of the 18th Legislative Assembly: Economy, Environment and Climate Change; Education, Training and Youth Development; Cost of Living; Community Wellness and Safety; and Governance.

Under Economy and Environment, we have completed or are working on 57 of 68 commitments, including major strategic investments in transportation infrastructure like the Mackenzie Valley Highway, Tlicho All-Season Road and Slave Geological Province Access Corridor that will help support the continued development of our economy and prosperity of our residents.

We have completed 20 of 22 commitments under Education, Training and Youth Development, Mr. Speaker, including supporting quality early childhood development, working to improve educational outcomes in JK to Grade 12, expanded opportunities for

post-secondary education, and enhanced and promoted capacity-building programs for our youth.

We have completed or are working on 36 of 37 commitments intended to address the high cost of living that all Northerners frequently have to deal with. Among these are actions to increase the availability of safe, affordable housing, steps to improve food security, and work to make childcare affordable and accessible. We have also addressed the high cost of energy, by supporting the use of energy efficient technologies and by increasing the production and transmission of renewable and alternative energy.

A strong territory begins with strong people and strong communities, Mr. Speaker, and our government has completed or is working on 63 of 64 commitments under the theme of Community Wellness and Safety. We have taken action to focus on mental health and addictions, ensured seniors have supports to age in place, fostered health families, taken action on the crisis of family and community violence, and created opportunities for healthy lifestyles and community leadership for our youth.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we have completed 36 of 39 commitments related to governance, including strengthening our relationships with Indigenous governments, and working to finalize and implement land, resources and self-government agreements. We have made significant steps towards increased transparency and accountability, built stronger relationships with community governments, and supported initiatives designed to increase the number of women running for elected office.

All told, Mr. Speaker, the Government and Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories completed over 90 percent of its mandate commitments. That is an achievement we can all be proud of, especially when you consider that ours is the first ever government to have a mandate like this.

Later in this sitting, I will be tabling the final report on the implementation of the Mandate, that will contain more detail about each of our completed commitments.

While I think we should be proud of our past accomplishments, Mr. Speaker, we also have to consider the future and what it holds for our territory. Advocating clearly and strongly

for federal attention to the needs of the Northwest Territories and its residents is an important part of our job as a government, and one that I have taken as a personal priority during my term as Premier. I also believe we have a duty as leaders to intervene on national matters that have implications for our territory, like recent changes to federal legislation that could affect the development and transportation of northern oil and gas resources.

I have always said that the Northwest Territories has all the right ingredients to be a major contributor to our country and its future, including natural resources to rival any other region and a strong, dynamic population ready to take advantage of opportunities for success.

Turning that potential into prosperity for ourselves and all Canadians requires sustained effort and planning on the part of our government and the Government of Canada. That is why I have taken steps to focus efforts to secure Canada's attention and support for our government's priorities. Those steps have included initiatives like NWT Days, the Red Alert, and the ongoing implementation of our government's Federal Engagement Strategy.

I am pleased to say that we have seen great success since taking a more deliberate approach to relationships with the federal government.

Budget 2019 included \$18 million, over three years, to support planning for the Taltson hydroelectricity expansion project.

A number of other budget announcements for the North will benefit the NWT, including increased allocations to the National Trade Corridors Fund for transportation infrastructure, the Investing in Canada Plan for alternative energy projects, funding to improve the climate resiliency of northern infrastructure, and a commitment to complete the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework.

Other notable successes include funding for the Snare Hydro project, the Mackenzie Valley Highway, double-hulled barges, the Hay River fish plant, and the marine training program, as well as access to early learning and child care.

We were also successful, Mr. Speaker, in our efforts to commence negotiations on a co-management regime for oil and gas in the Beaufort Sea offshore, along with a greater role in the five year science based review of the offshore moratorium, which has also started.

Our strategic approach also enabled our government to achieve positive outcomes for Northwest Territories residents on files that are important to the federal government, like carbon pricing. Canada gave all provinces and territories a choice, Mr. Speaker, to either design their own approach to carbon pricing, or to have the federal approach imposed on them. Through our federal engagement efforts, our government was able to have Canada agree to a made-in-the-North carbon pricing plan that is superior to the one Canada will impose if the Northwest Territories does not implement its own approach.

Mr. Speaker, by taking a more planned and focused approach to federal engagement, we have achieved our priorities. The strategy had three clear objectives – the first and most important being to focus our efforts on specific priorities to realize before the end of mandate. It also included other activities to help ensure we had broad support for the priorities within the federal government; and, that we were also setting the stage for future years and relationships.

Ensuring we had support from Indigenous governments and partners was a particular focus for the strategy. Outreach, education, and making full use of all opportunities to publicize our interests and priorities both at home and across Canada, required attention and coordination across departments and portfolios.

Last, but not least, we placed priority on developing broader and stronger working relationships with senior federal officials in support of ministerial relationships, as well as better decision-making by influencing policy and program development earlier in the process.

Our strategy worked because we had a plan, and were focused and disciplined. It's only fair to point out however, that some luck contributed to our achievements. I would note in particular, the appointment last summer of Dominic LeBlanc as Minister of Northern Affairs, which was a welcome surprise. He listened and helped get action on a number of

issues. Since his appointment, the new legislation formally creating the new department of Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs now provides for the appointment of a separate Minister of Northern Affairs should a future Prime Minister so choose.

Raising support for Northwest Territories priorities at home and in Ottawa is important, but is not the only way to achieve success as a territory. Canada's Premiers are also important potential allies. Support from them can help to mobilize support from Ottawa, and I have made it a point to reach out to them individually and in more formal settings like the Northern Premiers' Forum, Western Premiers' Conference, and the Council of the Federation.

Looking ahead to the next mandate, it's too early to say what the priorities of a new federal government might be. No matter who it is, we must not let up in our efforts to ensure that Northern perspectives and priorities are understood by the federal government and all Canadians, and that the GNWT is in a position to leverage opportunities and respond to emerging challenges.

As we come to the end of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for their hard work and dedication to the people of the Northwest Territories over the past four years. This is a great territory and it has a bright future ahead of it. I continue to believe in its potential and the critical role that we as Members of the Legislative Assembly have in making that future a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.