

February is Indigenous Languages Month

Mr. Speaker, February is Indigenous Languages Month in the Northwest Territories.

Following Portion will be spoken in Cree [This month we highlight the importance of language revitalization and celebrate our diverse Indigenous languages.] ***Resume English***

This month, let us celebrate the territory's nine Indigenous languages and learn about the important role language revitalization plays in advancing reconciliation in a real and meaningful way.

Mr. Speaker, for generations Indigenous people have lived under systems designed to erode their cultures, strip their identities and erase their languages. Here in the NWT and across Canada, we have seen a profound loss of language among Indigenous residents and communities. I am one of the countless Indigenous people who never acquired the language that was spoken by my ancestors. This is a reality that many people face, and one that must be addressed.

We have a shared responsibility, Mr. Speaker, as a government and as NWT residents to advocate for the territory's Indigenous languages and revitalize them.

This month I encourage NWT residents to connect with these languages through radio, podcasts, books, and television, and learn simple phrases and original place names.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has put together several resources and activities for residents, including a video on Indigenous Languages Month and a virtual scavenger hunt for tips on how each of us can support Indigenous language revitalization.

Across the territory residents will find coffee sleeves promoting Indigenous Language Month at their local coffee shops, and I hope everyone can take time to enjoy a coffee or tea while practicing new vocabulary and common phrases in one or more of the NWT's official Indigenous languages.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is working diligently to achieve its vision of an NWT where Indigenous languages are supported, respected and thriving. Every year, we feel momentum growing as more and more people are accessing our Indigenous languages programs.

We saw proof of this in December when we received a record 37 applications for the Indigenous Languages Revitalization Scholarship. These individuals are studying to become Indigenous language teachers, interpreters, translators, and linguists.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the participants of the third year of the Mentor-Apprentice Program who recently completed 200 hours of Indigenous language immersion. Their dedication is an inspiration. Increasing the number of fluent speakers will help expand services available in Indigenous languages across the government, in schools, early learning and child care programs, and other public services. The fourth year of the Mentor-Apprentice Program will begin accepting applications on February 13 and I encourage everyone to consider participating.

2022 marked the beginning of the United Nations' Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Mr. Speaker, the aim of the decade is to draw attention to the critical loss of Indigenous languages and the need to preserve, revitalize and promote them. The GNWT's Indigenous Languages Action Plan, which was recently extended to 2024-25, focuses on meeting these same goals for Indigenous language revitalization and providing access to public services in all nine of the NWT's official Indigenous languages.

Mr. Speaker, learning and reclaiming Indigenous languages requires commitment from governments, communities, and people. So let us all take the time this month to educate ourselves on the Indigenous languages spoken in our regions, support those who speak them, and encourage those who are learning them. By working together to revitalize the NWT's Indigenous languages, we will help strengthen NWT communities, regions and the territory as a whole.

kinanāskomitin, Mr. Speaker.