

Immigration and the Northwest Territories Nominee Program

Mr. Speaker, we will defeat the scourge of COVID-19, and when we do, we will be better prepared to attract and welcome new residents.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide an update on the new immigration related initiatives that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has implemented or undertaken in the past six months, including an immigration settlement and integration pilot project, development of a new immigration stream, the creation of new resources for newcomers, and a refreshed website. I am also happy to officially announce the launch of the all new online application portal that will replace the current paper-based application process.

ECE delivers the Employer Stream of the Northwest Territories Nominee Program, which assists employers in filling workforce gaps with skilled and semi-skilled foreign nationals when local workers are not available. While the vast majority of the Nominees supported under the Nominee Program are already working in the Territory, we continue to receive requests for information from people around the world who are interested in coming here. The entry of foreign nationals into Canada is a federal responsibility so, like other provinces and territories, we work with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to ensure that processes and supports are in place when we welcome new residents to the Territory.

In order to assist employers to build a skilled workforce while also supporting the immigration of foreign nationals who contribute to the economic development and success of the NWT, the Government of the Northwest Territories developed an Immigration Strategy, titled Building a Skilled Workforce and Vibrant Economy 2017-2022.

Recent progress on the actions from the strategy include the development and implementation of a comprehensive marketing strategy to promote the NWT and the Nominee Program to both employers and foreign nationals at the local, national and international levels. We are also working to introduce a new program stream specific to Francophone foreign nationals, which we hope will encourage new residents to become a part of our vibrant francophone community in the North.

With the input of local community organizations, we have developed a Welcome to the NWT resource booklet to provide key information to foreign nationals and newcomers on the services they need to settle, integrate and succeed in their new communities. This booklet shows newcomers what it is like to live here, and describes everything from initial checklists, to information on schools, community and government services, employment, healthcare, and weather. It is a very comprehensive, plainly written resource in both English and French and available on the ECE and immigratenwt.ca websites.

Mr. Speaker, the immigratenwt.ca website has been refreshed to a more vibrant story-centric site with testimonials, narratives and multimedia. It is one stop for all of the information we have on the Nominee Program, and now includes an online application portal.

The new online application system will be more user-friendly for the applicant, allow the departments to better track and manage the lifecycle of an application, and enhance accountability. It will eliminate the need for paper applications, while maintaining efficiency and improving the collection of information under the program.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to note that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest and the Fédération Franco-Ténoise are piloting the delivery of immigration settlement and integration services through an Integrated Service Centre for newcomers in Yellowknife. The goal of the pilot is to enhance the coordination and delivery of settlement and integration services, provide a one-stop-shop for these services, and support the success and retention of newcomer immigrants in the NWT. The Centre officially opened in December 2019 and will continue in pilot for the remainder of the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

To improve partnerships with immigration stakeholders we are holding semi-annual meetings with federally-funded Settlement Service Providers and offering information sessions and resources to newcomers and employers.

Mr. Speaker, from 2009-2019, the Employer Stream of the Nominee Program has welcomed 427 nominees to the territory. With their families, the total number is 819 people attending school, shopping at our stores, and contributing to their communities.

Since 2016, the Business Stream of the Nominee Program, delivered by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, welcomed 17 business nominees. Five are currently operating their businesses in Hay River and 12 are operating in Yellowknife. Together with their family members, these nominees bring new business services and a number of new residents to the territory.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to have requests for information from potential new residents to come to the NWT to live, work and contribute to a growing economy. Now more than ever, addressing workforce gaps and supporting the development of a strong labour market is critical to the territory's economic future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.