

Sessional Statement May 2018

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome Members back for the continuation of the Third Session of the 18th Legislative Assembly. We have a brief sitting this spring, but some important matters to consider as we continue to work together to build a better future for our territory and its residents.

The Government of the Northwest Territories continues to work hard to create a future full of opportunity and promise for territorial residents. Strategic engagement with the Government of Canada to help advance Northern priorities and interests is one of the ways our government can achieve that.

The Government of Canada continues to have important responsibilities to support economic, social and political development in the Northwest Territories. We know they take this responsibility seriously, and we have been working hard with them to turn their commitment into practical action and investments in our territory.

Continuing to meet with our federal counterparts to promote Northwest Territories priorities and interests is an important part of our successful strategy for engaging Canada. Most recently, I met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, along with Nunavut Premier Paul Quassa and Yukon Premier Sandy Silver as part of the Northern Premiers' Forum in Ottawa at the beginning of this month.

I was pleased that Prime Minister Trudeau personally reaffirmed his government's commitment to the Northwest Territories and to working with our government on shared priorities.

It was particularly important to hear from the Prime Minister that Canada agrees that the Pan-Territorial Vision for Sustainable Development issued by our three territories last August will form the basis for the Arctic Policy Framework.

Placing sustainable economic development at the heart of federal policy in the North will be critical to creating a better, more prosperous future for residents. It will be critical for Canada to match its policy commitments to our territory with specific investments and funding commitments, and Premiers were encouraged to learn that Canada will be using the Arctic Policy Framework to guide future funding commitments in its upcoming budgets.

Our government's efforts to directly engage the federal government on behalf of the Northwest Territories are starting to pay off. In recent months we have been successful in securing a number of significant funding agreements and investments from Canada.

In March, Ministers Schumann and Cochrane joined Infrastructure Canada Minister Sohi to announce the signing of a ten-year infrastructure agreement that will see \$570 million invested in the Northwest Territories.

In April, Canada announced it is making just over \$94 million available to the Northwest Territories and Nunavut over five years to make Arctic re-supply operations faster, safer, and more efficient for remote communities under its Ocean Protection Plan.

The GNWT is looking forward to applying for funding under this program to improve the Mackenzie River and high Arctic marine transportation corridor. This corridor is a critical piece of our northern transportation system, serving some of Canada's northernmost residents, and the new funding will help support economic development in a region increasingly being recognized as an area of opportunity.

Our government is pleased with this recent commitment from federal Minister of Transport Marc Garneau and also hopes for positive news regarding our applications for funding under the National Trade Corridor Fund for projects that will help advance the Mackenzie Valley Highway. We also look forward to a second call for applications under this Fund as an opportunity to advance the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor.

Also in April, Minister Moses and federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Jean-Yves Duclos announced a three-year agreement to invest over \$7 million in early learning and child care in the Northwest Territories. This funding will support delivery of high-quality early learning and child care; culturally relevant professional development and

training for all staff working within licensed early childhood programs; an increase in the number of qualified early childhood development professionals in licensed programs; and access to early learning and child care opportunities within all communities in the Northwest Territories.

Advancing, finalizing and implementing land, resources and self-government agreements is a priority of this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and another area where success will create a better future for Northwest Territories residents.

Settlement of land claims in the southern part of the territory is also a priority for our government and will be a critical factor in affirming the rights of Indigenous people in these regions, creating certainty and helping unlock the economic potential of the Northwest Territories to create benefits and opportunities for all residents.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to achieving success at these tables and has worked hard with all parties to identify a path forward on negotiations with the Dehcho First Nations, NWT Métis Nation and Akaitcho Dene First Nation.

Last year, the Government of Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories made innovative new offers to the NWT Métis and the Akaitcho, based on the work of a Ministerial Special Representative appointed by Minister Bennett and myself.

I am also pleased to advise Members that Canada and the GNWT made a new offer to the Dehcho First Nations on May 3, 2018 in Fort Simpson. As with the new offers to the Akaitcho and NWT Métis, the offer to the Dehcho was designed to provide them with the flexibility to choose an approach that best reflects their priorities with respect to matters including land quantum, cash, resource management and land use planning.

We expect that the new offer will be formally considered by the Dehcho First Nation at their annual assembly in Wrigley in July. Our negotiators have done some innovative and forward work with their counterparts from the Government of Canada on this offer. We are hopeful this work will help us get beyond past disagreements and old ways of thinking and result in the settlement of this claim.

We continue to make progress on the government's legislative agenda, Mr. Speaker. During this sitting we expect to introduce several pieces of proposed legislation, including the Northwest Territories' first Ombudsperson Act, a priority for this House and a commitment in the government's Mandate. We also expect to introduce *An Act to Amend the Cities, Towns and Villages Act*. This bill responds to requests from community governments to have the ability to levy a tourism accommodation tax and to pass bylaws that would permit homeowners to fund energy retrofits and energy saving technology upgrades through a local improvement charge.

During this sitting we will table the 2017-2018 Annual Report on the Implementation of the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker. The annual report indicates that as of March 31st, 2018, our government had fulfilled 60 commitments. Another 160 commitments were in progress by that date, with another 10 in the planning stage. Since March 31st, 19 additional commitments have been fulfilled, bringing the total number of fulfilled commitments to 79. While some of the commitments are fulfilled by a specific activity or action, a number of the commitments relate to work that is ongoing. As we pass the halfway point of this Legislative Assembly, we are confident in saying that we have taken the steps required to implement many of these commitments, and will continue to do so on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Speaker, since the mandate was adopted by the 18th Legislative Assembly near the beginning of our term, our government has been focused on fulfilling our commitments and advancing the priorities of this Legislative Assembly. Between June and October of last year, at the mid-point of our term, all Members contributed to a comprehensive review of our priorities and the mandate. We had the opportunity to evaluate our progress, consider new information, and reflect on new developments and major events in the Northwest Territories, Canada and the world. Through this process, we revised the mandate. It now includes 230 commitments to guide our activities through the remainder of this term.

Two significant additions to the mandate will be the subject of discussions during this sitting: conducting a foundational review of Aurora College, and developing and implementing the policy, program and legislative regimes necessary to support the legalization of cannabis in the Northwest Territories.

Both these initiatives are of great interest to the people of the Northwest Territories and Members of the Legislative Assembly. Indeed, there has been much discussion of cannabis legalization in the media in the past few weeks, as Standing Committees have done their important work to hear from residents on Bill 6.

We understand that residents are concerned about the potential impact of legal cannabis on their families and communities and we respect that concern. Legalization was a federal election promise and the Government of Canada continues to work towards delivering on that promise in the coming weeks. Many jurisdictions, including our own, are working hard to be ready in time for federal legalization and, while it would be nice to have more time to get ready, it does not look like that will be an option.

Our government made a commitment to having effective measures in place to protect the health and safety of Northwest Territories residents when federal legislation comes into effect. We continue to be committed to that goal and are confident that we will be prepared. We do recognize, however, that this is a new area of responsibility for ourselves and the rest of the country and we will continue to monitor implementation once cannabis has been legalized so we can identify any areas where we can make improvements and modifications to our plans.

The future of Aurora College has also been the subject of much discussion in recent months, and we expect that discussion will continue during this sitting. As Members are aware, the Government has received the report of the consultants hired to conduct the foundational review of the college.

The consultants have delivered a comprehensive report with many recommendations about how we can move forward to create a vibrant post-secondary institution in the North that is positioned to train Northerners for Northern jobs. It is now our job to consider each of those recommendations and use them to determine a path forward for the college.

This is the beginning of a longer process to plan for the future of the college and we look forward to working with MLAs as we develop them together. Northwest Territories residents deserve an educational institution that is focused on preparing them for the challenges and

opportunities of tomorrow and the Aurora College Foundational Review is an opportunity for us to deliver the kind of post-secondary institution they need as a legacy of our work here.

This is a brief sitting, Mr. Speaker, but I expect it will be an active one. As always, we have an important responsibility to work together to create positive change for the people and communities of the Northwest Territories. Our government remains committed to that work and looks forward to continuing to work towards that goal during this sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.