

**Supporting Community Employment and
Economic Development in Small Communities**

Mr. Speaker, increasing employment in small communities is one of the priorities outlined in the priorities for the 19th Legislative Assembly. Now more than ever, as we begin to plan for social and economic recovery from COVID-19, we need to ensure there are opportunities for meaningful employment and economic development for our people to keep our communities and territory strong.

I grew up in a small community, Aklavik, where I learned the importance of having a strong community. While our large strategic infrastructure projects are often in the spotlight, we need to give credit to our Regional Operations and smaller-scale projects for making an impact on the lives of Northerners with the opportunities they present.

Mr. Speaker, part of the Department of Infrastructure's core business is the delivery of programs, services and projects by our staff in all regions of the territory. Almost two thirds of Infrastructure staff work outside of headquarters in regional offices, with 329 employees based in regional centres, and 46 located in smaller communities.

Infrastructure's Regional Operations work hard to keep our 863 GNWT-owned buildings running smoothly. They also oversee the construction, operations and maintenance of the highway system, including over 2,400 kilometres of all-weather roads, over 1,400 kilometres of winter roads, and four ferries.

Mr. Speaker, that is a lot of work, and we cannot do it alone. Many projects and operations are contracted to local communities and/or businesses, which allows the government to operate efficiently, while creating employment at the local level.

Some of these contracts include our ferries, where three of NWT's four ferries are operated by local contractors. We also have contracts in place with 14 NWT businesses for highway maintenance, some of which are with Indigenous and community governments. Out of 27 airports in the territory, eight are operated and maintained by Infrastructure staff, and operations at the 19 smaller airports are contracted to local businesses. Motor vehicle issuing services are also provided at the regional level through a mix of GNWT staff and contractors.

On top of our operational work in the regions, the Department of Infrastructure is also making strategic investments in our territory's future. In partnership with the federal government, we are advancing several significant infrastructure projects. The 2020-2021 Infrastructure Acquisition Plan will deliver a total of 152 capital projects in 28 NWT communities, including schools, long-term care and health care facilities, and major transportation projects.

Mr. Speaker, to help our residents benefit from these projects, we must increase training and employment. Led by the Department of Infrastructure, the GNWT is working with its project partners to incorporate training opportunities that will lead to maximized benefits for residents. For example, the GNWT and the Pehdzéh Kí First Nation together established the Wrigley Mackenzie Valley Highway Training Committee to identify training opportunities for that project, to facilitate development and delivery of training programs for the residents of Wrigley, and to facilitate access to funding for these programs.

Similarly, we worked with North Star Infrastructure to include training requirements in the Project Agreement for the Tłıchǫ All-Season Road project. As of late this summer, almost nine thousand hours of training have been provided to Tłıchǫ citizens in different areas such as heavy equipment operator, cook, crushing operation, and job readiness training. Now that the end of its construction is in sight, these individuals will be able apply the skills they have developed on other jobs.

Mr. Speaker, providing employment and economic development opportunities will help

support our communities as we recover from the economic impacts caused by the pandemic, and beyond. Providing employment opportunities are important for the cultural preservation of our communities, so we can continue to engage in our traditional activities and pass on teachings to the next generation. The GNWT will continue our work to support the residents of our small communities.

Quana, Mr. Speaker.