

Sessional Statement

Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome my colleagues back to the Legislative Assembly for the continuation of the Third Session. This will be a very active sitting for us, as we continue making important decisions to create a strong future for the Northwest Territories.

With one year left in our term, we are getting into the home stretch for the 18th Legislative Assembly.

At the beginning of this Legislative Assembly, all Members agreed to adopt an ambitious mandate based on our shared priorities. Our plan, the first of its kind produced by the Government of the Northwest Territories, included over 200 specific commitments that the Government would undertake over its complete four-year term to advance the priorities of the Legislative Assembly.

Following a review of our progress and some amendments, the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories now includes 233 commitments. To date, we have completed 104 of those commitments.

We have made good progress on our commitments, Mr. Speaker, and as we enter into the final year of the 18th Legislative Assembly, the Government of the Northwest Territories expects to complete many more.

Engaging with the Government of Canada is an important part of how our government is fulfilling its commitments on behalf of the people of the Northwest Territories.

Even after devolution, the federal government has substantial responsibilities in the Northwest Territories and an important role to play in working with Northerners to create sustainable social and economic development.

That is why the Government of the Northwest Territories has been working hard to ensure that Canada understands the needs and priorities of Northerners, and the potential impacts of their decisions and policies on the North.

Our efforts have included clearly making the case for Northwest Territories priorities like Taltson expansion, investment in transportation infrastructure, and assistance in getting

our communities off diesel in our direct contacts with the federal government and in the media through vehicles like the red alert.

We have also taken advantage of opportunities to engage with parliamentary committees to ensure parliamentarians in all parties understand what makes the North unique and its unique priorities. That has included presentations by our government to the Senate Committee on the Arctic and the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples last month, and a meeting with the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development last week.

That work to raise the profile of the Northwest Territories and get our priorities on the federal government's radar is starting to pay dividends.

At the end of June, our government and the Government of Canada announced a joint \$140 million investment in the Mackenzie Valley Highway, including the construction of the Great Bear River Bridge and the construction of an access road from Wrigley to Mount Gaudet. These are important projects for the Sahtu and Dehcho regions that will help support further economic development and advance our vision of connecting communities down the valley.

Just this morning, Minister Wally Schumann and federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna announced the approval of funding under the federal Low-Carbon Economy Fund for several Northwest Territories projects.

Approval of these projects is an important part of fulfilling Canada's commitment to help the Northwest Territories implement the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and will improve energy security for our residents, stabilize the cost of living and address the impacts of climate change.

Another positive step was the announcement by federal Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs Dominic LeBlanc and Minister of Natural Resources Amarjeet Sohi of a path forward on Arctic offshore oil and gas development last week.

Resource development has been and will continue to be a significant sector of the Northwest Territories economy, responsible for providing jobs and prosperity for our people. It has been no secret that the oil and gas sector has struggled in recent years, and that that has had a negative impact on the people of the Beaufort Delta and Sahtu regions in particular.

The news that Canada is prepared to move ahead with a science-based review of their indefinite moratorium on Arctic oil and gas development and that the Government of the Northwest Territories will have a role in that review is an important step in the right

direction for the territorial economy, and a signal that Canada has heard the message that Northerners must be involved in making decisions about the North.

We are also pleased that Canada has announced it will take steps to fulfill its commitment in the devolution agreement to negotiate co-management of offshore oil and gas development with our government, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the Government of Yukon.

These two commitments, along with the resumption of production in Norman Wells following the completion of repairs to the Enbridge Line 21 pipeline are positive developments for the NWT economy and we are pleased to see movement in this important sector again.

While these developments are welcome, the Government of the Northwest Territories understands that promoting the long-term economic and social development of the territory needs to take a broad view that includes multiple sectors. It is also going to take a practical plan that will help focus efforts and investments into those sectors and projects that can create the greatest sustained benefit for our people.

To be successful, that plan has to reflect the broadly held priorities of all Northerners, including the Government of the Northwest Territories and Indigenous governments. It will also have to be a shared plan that all our governments are committed to following and implementing.

At the beginning of last week, I invited leaders from all the Indigenous governments and their economic development arms to meet with Ministers Robert C. McLeod, Wally Schumann and myself for an in-depth discussion about the future of the NWT economy.

Over two and a half days, we had some frank discussions about how we can work together to promote the economic development of the whole territory, not just our individual regions. We took a hard look at the challenges we face, including those we sometimes create for ourselves, and at the opportunities for economic development we think we can realistically pursue.

At the end of our discussions, leaders agreed that we need to take immediate steps to address the economic challenges the Northwest Territories faces, in order to ensure a sustainable future for the North and its residents.

Leaders also agreed that large-scale investment in northern energy, transportation and communications infrastructure corridors is key to creating investment and economic opportunities in all sectors.

Our goal remains to create a prosperous, sustainable future built on the foundation of a strong, diversified economy, which consists of traditional sectors like tourism, agriculture, harvesting, cultural arts and fishing, but also recognizes the large role that non-renewable sectors like mining and oil and gas have and will continue to play in our territory.

At the end of the symposium, leaders agreed to consider establishing a working group with representatives from the Indigenous governments and the Government of the Northwest Territories to identify economic opportunities and concrete next steps that we can take together to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for all Northwest Territories residents.

I have always said that partnership is an essential feature of how we do business here in the Northwest Territories, and I want to thank all the participants at last week's symposium for coming to the table with their ideas and a willingness to look for solutions. I look forward to continuing our work together in the coming months.

Identifying the shared economic priorities of our government and Indigenous governments will help us create consensus we need to move forward as a territory. It will also help our government as we continue to work with the federal government on completing an Arctic Policy Framework that will set out federal priorities and spending commitments for social and economic development in the North.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I do want to note that during this sitting we will be debating the Government of the Northwest Territories Infrastructure Acquisition Plan for 2019-2020.

Our government's capital budget is a significant investment in our communities and in the future of the territory, and this year we will be tabling the biggest capital plan we have ever proposed.

We often hear about the need for spending on transportation infrastructure, and it is true that that is a priority for this government, partly because we are able to leverage substantial federal funding for these projects with a comparatively small investment of territorial money.

We should not, though, let those projects overshadow the many smaller but equally important projects in our communities that provide housing for our residents, schools and health facilities.

As an example of this investment, in the past few months, we have been able to open the Woodland Manor extension in Hay River and new health and social services centres in Norman Wells and Fort Resolution. Other health infrastructure projects are on the horizon, including the completion of the new Stanton Territorial Hospital.

I look forward to discussing our proposed infrastructure budget with Members during the upcoming sitting, Mr. Speaker, and continuing to work with them to fulfill our commitments to create a strong future for all residents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.