

Sessional Statement

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to welcome all Members back to this Assembly. As the fall season, settles in, the month of October marks the half way point of our 16th Assembly.

It has been almost two years since we first came together with individual mandates from the people of the Northwest Territories to govern and make decisions that would contribute to the betterment of our Territory as a whole - and our future.

We identified – then - the vision, the goals and the priorities that are guiding our work today:

Strong individuals, families and communities sharing the benefits and responsibilities of a unified, environmentally sustainable and prosperous Northwest Territories.

We all agreed to work together – as Northerners – to realize:

- A strong and independent north built on partnerships
- An environment that will sustain present and future generations
- Healthy, educated people
- A diversified economy that provides all communities and regions with opportunities and choices
- Sustainable, vibrant, safe communities; and
- Effective and efficient government

While the Assembly put forward this direction, Executive Council was tasked to develop and implement the vision that we had identified – and to be accountable to Members of this House and to the people of the NWT – to get the job done.

To that end, we broke down our goals and priorities into specific actions, projects and investments and organized them into five strategic areas: Maximizing Opportunities, Reducing the Cost of Living, Building Our Future, Managing this Land and Refocusing Government.

As I address you today, I am happy to report that this Government has identified and implemented over 140 initiatives and investments dedicated to advancing the goals and priorities of the 16th Assembly.

These initiatives and investments - above and beyond our day to day work as government – recognize and reflect the importance of looking beyond the immediate and short term needs of our Territory and people - towards our vision and our future.

Investments and Initiatives specific to the 16th Assembly shared vision of Northerners Working Together. They include:

Funding to expand the implementation of our Healthy Choices Framework promoting active living and healthy foods.

Enhanced family violence programming and new resources to support aftercare programs for those wrestling with addictions.

Investments to improve housing conditions under the CARE program – and the addition of 500 units under the affordable housing program.

Substantial infrastructure investments in highways, winter road and airports that are improving connections between communities and will help address one of the key factors in our high cost of living.

We have undertaken an electricity review in the interest of examining and addressing our approach to the distribution, regulation and subsidization of power in the NWT.

Policing services have been enhanced in smaller communities through investments in new detachments and by expanding those detachments that serve multiple communities.

Investments have also been made in school infrastructure, specifically in Inuvik, Fort Good Hope, Yellowknife and N'dilo where new facilities are coming on stream. Further investments are planned for schools in Aklavik, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, Gamèti, Hay River, Tulita and Yellowknife.

Beyond that, we have provided funding to schools to increase their teacher resources and to allow high schools to enhance their trade programs.

The Implementation of an income security framework – including changes for the income support program and Seniors Supplementary Income Benefit – has provided additional resources to those most in need.

We have advanced wind, biomass and mini-hydro projects that will reduce the reliance on fossil fuels, reduce the cost of living and support our commitment to greenhouse gas reductions.

Programs and resources have been introduced to promote and support local business and community economic development efforts – many of them in tourism - in our most rural and remote communities.

Meanwhile, we are also looking inward - conducting reviews of GNWT programs to ensure that programs are achieving their intended results in an effective and efficient manner.

In all of this, Mr. Speaker, we have implemented changes to our Government's capital planning process - to improve the planning, acquisition and delivery of infrastructure – and this year will advance the largest single year capital budget in the history of the NWT.

We have committed and leveraged an unprecedented amount of federal economic stimulus investment.

We have advanced pivotal initiatives such as the water strategy, Land Use Framework and the Species at Risk Act. Work is underway to finalize a Wildlife Act - and we have articulated, and more importantly renewed, our commitment to the unique consensus based system with which we govern.

During a period that has been challenged by the difficult and emotional task of putting our financial house in order, the economic realities of a global recession and the need to address critical issues such as H1N1 and the dramatic decline of the Bathurst Caribou herd – we have initiated, implemented and completed an incredible amount of work.

As important as the work itself, however, is the manner in which we have addressed it.

The strategic initiative committees that we established have allowed Members of the 16th Legislative Assembly to be directly involved in formulating and guiding the initiatives of government.

We have maintained a tight control on our costs. Spending growth has been held to 2 per cent. Our budget process has been more controlled, planned and accountable. Supplementary appropriations have been cut by more than 50%.

Community Governments are playing an increased role in targeting the priorities and investments in their communities.

Northern and Aboriginally owned companies are providing increasingly key roles in the advancement of major infrastructure initiatives such as the Taltson Hydro facility, the Kakisa Bridge, health centres, hospitals, schools and the many investments that we have made in the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road Bridges Program.

In fact, at a time when Canada's economy has slowed due to the international recession, our Capital Plan has provided significant investment in the NWT – and substantial employment and contract opportunities for our residents and contractors.

Meanwhile, through processes such as our Regional Aboriginal Leaders Forums, Wildlife Co-management Boards, the Roundtable on Revenue Options and the Ministerial Advisory Panel on the Economy, we are receiving input and guidance - forging stronger relationships with our Aboriginal Governments – and engaging Northerners at all levels.

In all of this – the initiatives - the investments – and the manner in which we have chosen to implement and advance our work – we are building our future – our people – our leaders – our businesses – and our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I was honoured, two years ago to be selected as Premier to lead and be accountable to Members and to the people of the NWT in advancing our vision of Northerners Working Together.

Despite the challenges that we have faced, Members of this House and the people of the Northwest Territories can be assured that we have never once waived from this direction or commitment.

As we approach the mid way point of our Assembly, we have a foundation in place to empower our vision – the investments that we have identified - the processes that we have established – and the sometimes difficult decisions that we have made.

I look forward to building on that foundation - and to conclude the work that we began together.

In the long-term, the Northwest Territories will play a crucial and growing role in filling the world's demand for natural resources. Meeting this rising demand will provide our people and our Territory with opportunities and choices.

It will also be good for Canada – and we will continue to make this case to Ottawa. To encourage them to clear the last few hurdles associated with the Mackenzie Gas Project. To advance support for the development of NWT hydro as well as other alternative energy sources.

We will continue to champion the need for federal investment in our transportation infrastructure – to open the door for future development and to lower the cost of living and doing business in the NWT. And we will build on our efforts to finalize a deal on Devolution and resource revenue sharing.

These are important initiatives. They concern issues that will require northern leadership and northern perspective.

In the coming months, it is my hope that we can also advance work towards a common vision for the political development of our Territory to ensure that - in the future - these key decisions about our issues and about our future – are made here in the NWT.

I believe that the 16th Legislative Assembly is uniquely placed to undertake and guide the work necessary to develop a common vision for the NWT - and to demonstrate that we have the capacity and the unity to govern ourselves – effectively and with a view to our future.

I would like to commend my colleagues in this Assembly for their courage and foresight in identifying and supporting the sometimes difficult directions and initiatives that this Government has taken.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to recognize the men and women who work and serve as employees of our Government across our Territory for their work to implement these initiatives while maintaining the ongoing delivery of Government services that our Territory depends on.

Thank You