

Public Service Capacity - Community Governments

Mr. Speaker, in May 2009, I announced to Members that Municipal and Community Affairs would be leading the work on capacity building initiatives at the local government level, in full partnership with the Department of Human Resources as well as the Northwest Territories Association of Communities and the Local Government Administrators of the Northwest Territories.

Today, I would like to provide members with an update on the details of this exciting initiative. However before I do, I need to thank our key partners in public service capacity building – the NWT Association of Communities and the Local Government Administrators of the NWT. Without their vision, pragmatic advice and informed analysis, we would not be as advanced as we are in the development of strategies that aim to address this issue. At both the board and staff levels, these two organizations are fully committed to rolling up their sleeves and providing hands on efforts to make this opportunity as meaningful and far reaching as possible.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Service Capacity for Local Government initiative will include a series of strategies, each aimed at strengthening the capacity of local government administrators as well as the leadership capacity of Mayors, Chiefs and Councilors so that they can provide effective direction and support to their staff.

The first priority for the Initiative focuses on the key position Councils need to both maintain the day to day operations and to implement their long term vision; this is the local government administrator – also known as the SAOs and Band Managers. We all know that local governments in the NWT have undergone significant evolution and

transformation in their relatively short history. As a result, the skill set required to manage a local government has expanded significantly and at this point, many NWT local governments are challenged to recruit and retain competent administrators. This initiative will work to address this challenge and raise the profile of this rewarding and exciting profession.

Working in collaboration, the NWT Association of Communities, Local Government Administrators of the NWT, the Department of Human Resources and MACA have developed a number of strategies as part of this initiative. One of the larger initiatives is the Administrator Development Program, where local governments can apply for two year funding to support either a trainee or mentor for their administrator position, depending on the current needs of the local government. There will be strong encouragement for local governments to hire northerners into their permanent administrator position.

Another initiative is the 'Good Governance' training for elected leaders. This program was successfully piloted earlier this year by the School of Community Government with a number of participants who were attending the NWT Association of Communities annual general meeting. This training will be offered to every newly elected council on an ongoing basis so that councilors have a common knowledge base around roles and responsibilities, especially in relationship to their administrator.

There will also be an Administrator Mentorship Program where skilled, experienced administrators will be available to formally mentor those who are developing their skills. As well, a pool of professionals will be developed, where local governments can access temporary expertise on an interim basis to trouble-shoot or maintain services during a vacancy.

Professional development workshops will be held to build the skills and expertise of administrators. The first one, planned to coincide with the Local Government Administrators of the NWT's 2009 annual general meeting will address recruitment and retention challenges in local governments.

As well, an array of promotional materials will be developed, including brochures, information on Local Government Administrators of the NWT's website and the production of a video on Council- Administrator engagement. These will be targeted primarily to northerners, to encourage them to consider the interesting and challenging work opportunities available in local governance.

In past discussions I have had with Standing Committee, they have provided excellent ideas and suggestions on the topic of community capacity, and we look forward to their input and analysis prior to the formal launch of this initiative.

I would like to thank Mayor Gord Van Tighem from the NWT Association to Communities and John McKee from the Local Government Administrators of the NWT for their leadership.

A capable public service – at all levels of government – is essential if we want to see quality programs and services developed and maintained for our citizens. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we are providing the tools, supports and resources to local governments to make this happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.