

Working Towards a Common Northern Voice for the NWT

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to speak to the important priority of working toward a common vision for the political development of the NWT – one of the key priorities that we have identified for this 16th Legislative Assembly.

The North and the Arctic have never before had such profile nationally and internationally. Whether the attention we are getting is about protecting Canadian sovereignty and security, the eventual opening up of the Northwest Passage, our significant renewable and non renewable resource potential or is about the increasing affects of climate change in the Canadian and circumpolar North, no one can deny that the challenges and opportunities that we are dealing with have garnered the attention of Canadian and international audiences.

Our challenge is no longer how to get on the national and international agenda, but – rather - to ensure that our voices and interests are heard and recognized - not dismissed or overshadowed by the opinion, commentary or even dispersions of those who do not live here.

As northern leaders, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that the voices and interests of NWT residents are heard and - that the focus of discussions and conversations about the North is changed so that it is “us” speaking about “our” issues and “our” realities and that “we” as Northerners are shaping our future course.

Mr. Speaker, We are stronger and more effective advocates for northern people and their interests when we can speak and act collectively.

It is my belief that a unified Northern voice will be more successful in garnering the attention and understanding of decision makers in our federal government, internationally and elsewhere.

As Members are aware, we have established a Northern Leaders’ Forum which includes two MLA’s, representation from the NWT Association of Communities, and all regional Aboriginal government leaders.

Our first meeting in July was positive and we agreed to continue discussions and to work together to engage with Northerners to help unify our voice. and work towards articulating a common vision for the NWT.

A strong and clear vision will enhance our ability to advance key issues of importance for northern governments.

Our Northern Leaders' forum will meet again in November to discuss how we will move forward together.

Mr. Speaker, I am committed to working with Members and Northern leaders during the remainder of our Assembly's term to realize a common northern vision for the political development of the NWT and advancing our goal of building a strong and independent north built on partnerships.

Thank you.