

Progress on Implementing the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2016-2019

Mr. Speaker, Northwest Territories' residents want a government that is transparent and accountable. On March 3, 2016, for the first time in the Northwest Territories, Members of the Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted a Mandate for the Government of the Northwest Territories. The purpose of the Mandate is to guide the work of the Government of the Northwest Territories over its four-year term.

Mr. Speaker, the Mandate enhances the transparency of the Government of the Northwest Territories by clearly stating what the government commits to do to advance the Priorities of the 18th Legislative Assembly. The Mandate enhances accountability by ensuring that voters and Members of the Legislative Assembly can hold the government to account in fulfilling these commitments.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is required to report annually on the progress it has made to implement the Mandate. In accordance with the Process Convention on Priority Setting and Reporting, later today, at the appropriate time, I will table the first annual report on the Mandate.

In the year since the Mandate was adopted, the Government of the Northwest Territories has made progress on a number of commitments in the areas of economy, environment and climate change; education, training and youth development; cost of living; community wellness and safety; and, governance. I am pleased to share with you some of the highlights of the Government of the Northwest Territories' achievements in implementing our commitments.

Mr. Speaker, in the past year we have been actively working to diversify our economy and ensure that our residents have the skills and experience to take advantage of new economic opportunities. In these pursuits, we are investing in transportation infrastructure projects to open new business development opportunities, such as opportunities for increased tourism. We have developed an Agriculture Strategy and a Commercial Fishery Revitalization Strategy, and we continue to implement the Film Strategy and a new tourism plan, all in an effort to build local markets, export goods and expand the number of tourists. Our Skills 4 Success Action Plan will ensure our education and training system keeps up with the changing labour market. We are also attracting new skilled labour from abroad, and investing in broadband infrastructure to further modernize the Northwest Territories' economy.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is working to achieve a sustainable environment that contributes to the economic well-being and quality of life of our residents. We are carefully working to modernize our laws for regulating land tenure, water use and mineral development, as well as environmental conservation. The Government of the Northwest Territories is protecting biodiversity and ecosystem integrity through partnerships that reflect the vision set out in the Government of the Northwest Territories' Land Use and Sustainability Framework. As part of the Government of the Northwest Territories' commitment to addressing climate change and improving the affordability, reliability and sustainability of energy, we have been conducting extensive public engagement to inform the development of an NWT Energy Strategy and an NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework.

Mr. Speaker, education is a key element to achieving our overall goals for a strong and sustainable territory. As such, we have made changes to the funding model for the Early Childhood Program, advanced measures to fully fund the cost of implementing Junior Kindergarten in all communities, including the 13 communities that do not currently offer the program, and strengthened French language education, as well as cultural, heritage and Aboriginal language programming. Additional efforts are being made outside of the school system to support youth in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, our climate, population distribution, and distance from major markets result in a high cost of living and high costs of operating businesses in the Northwest Territories. In addition to constructing the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway, we have secured federal investment for the Tłı̄ch̄o All-season Road Project, projects that will help to lower the cost of living for residents. The Government of the Northwest Territories is working on programs and services for those who are homeless and to alleviate barriers to accessing existing government programs and services. The Government of the Northwest Territories has formed partnerships to find solutions to address homelessness and northern housing issues, including the City of Yellowknife's Housing First initiative and similar solutions in other communities. We have established additional local housing organizations and are participating in the development of a national housing strategy. Working nationally, we already secured an increase of 33 per cent to the Northern Residents Tax Deduction, and a federal commitment of \$64.5 million over five years to expand Nutrition North.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with families, community groups, police, courts, and schools to ensure the wellness and safety of our communities. We are making progress on our commitments to strengthen initiatives and partnerships to reduce family violence. One of these initiatives is the Domestic Violence Treatment Options Court, an option that is now available to offenders not only in Yellowknife and Hay River, but also to those from Behchokò, Enterprise, and the K'at'l'odeeche First Nation. We continue to invest in five family violence shelters across the territory, in programming for children exposed to family violence, and in the development of family violence protocols and response teams for regions without shelters. Progress has been demonstrated in a number of areas to reduce the burden of chronic disease, for example, through Healthy Living Fairs, the Let's Talk About Cancer website, and facilitating the establishment of a territorial diabetes registry to monitor and measure related trends. One of the Government of the Northwest Territories' most significant accomplishments so far during the 18th Assembly is the creation of a single NWT Health and Social Services Authority and Regional Wellness Councils to give each region a say in how care and services are delivered. This transformation of the health and social services system will improve access, consistency, and cultural appropriateness of care and services, as well as improve accountability and performance.

Mr. Speaker, our government also made a commitment to focus on mental health and addictions, to ensure access to culturally appropriate programs and services, address gaps in services, and enhance treatment options. We brought forward the strategic framework *Mind and Spirit: Promoting Mental Health and Addictions Recovery* to set the foundation for systematic improvements, and are now focused on areas requiring specific approaches: children and youth mental wellness, addictions recovery and mental health services.

Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset, one of our priorities is to improve accountability, transparency, and collaboration. In the first year of this government's Mandate, we have been doing business differently, increasing public engagement, and further embracing the principles of open government. The Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency is undertaking public engagement across the NWT to ensure that the development of an open government policy reflects territorial priorities. Cabinet has engaged directly with residents in several communities and listened to their concerns through well-attended open houses. Our government has also gone beyond the requirement of publishing an annual report on our Mandate, to developing and maintaining a public website dedicated to tracking the Government of the Northwest Territories' fulfillment of its commitments in the Mandate. We have made progress toward making information from government more available and more easily accessible. To understand how better to share and protect information, the government has conducted public engagement on updating the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Public engagement has also taken place on other initiatives, including the Recreational Land Management Framework and the modernization of the *Fire Prevention Act*.

A major priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories is to take further steps towards the recognition and respect of Aboriginal governments, and we have made a commitment in our Mandate to work to resolve outstanding land, resource and self-government agreements.

Alongside the federal government, we have appointed Ministerial Special Representatives to talk to all parties involved in negotiations in the Dehcho and South Slave Regions, including the Dehcho First Nations, Akaitcho, and Northwest Territory Métis Nation, in order to facilitate the settlement of claims in these regions. The government has been implementing more flexible and adaptive approaches to negotiations with a view towards finding compromise and reaching agreements. We are achieving positive results from these efforts, as evidenced at Final Agreement negotiations with the Acho Dene First Nation of Fort Liard, where the parties have reached a point where key decisions involving land and governance lay before them. We are assisting with implementation of the Délı̄nę self-government agreement, and are working with other Aboriginal governments on building administrative capacity.

Mr. Speaker, this represents just some of the progress we have made to date in implementing the commitments made in the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories. The Mandate will continue to be an important tool for measuring the success of the government and the Legislative Assembly, and I look forward to reporting additional progress in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.