



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

0th Session

Day 1

20th Assembly

ROUND TABLE

Monday, November 27, 2023

Pages 1 - 40

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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(Kam Lake)

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(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

Mr. Robert Hawkins
(Yellowknife Centre)

Mrs. Lucy Kuptana
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Mr. Vince McKay
(Hay River South)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Monday, November 27, 2023****Members Present**

Ms. Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Mrs. Kuptana, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. McKay, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Ms. Semmler, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Mr. Thompson, Ms. Wawzonek, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Mrs. Yakeleya.

The House met at 9:00 a.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

**Opening Remarks by the Clerk of the
Legislative Assembly****CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):**

Thank you, Ms. Cleveland. My name is Glen Rutland, and I am the Clerk of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly. Until your Speaker is elected, it is my responsibility to act as the presiding officer over your proceedings. I am joined at the table today by deputy clerk Kim Wickens and deputy clerk Jolene Saturino.

On behalf of the staff of the Legislative Assembly, I want to take this moment to congratulate each of you on your election to the 20th Legislative Assembly. One of the unique features of consensus government is that regardless of your roles within the Assembly, each of you will be active participants in forging the priorities of the 20th Legislative Assembly. It must be noted, however, that the priority setting process will look a little different in this Assembly. Typically, priority setting is one of the first orders of business for a new Assembly. Your predecessors recommended, and you have agreed, to take additional time to settle into your new roles and allow for more flexible and extended input process with a goal of setting priorities for the winter sitting of the 20th Assembly. You made this decision to allow for a more wholesome opportunity to understand what the 20th Assembly will focus on and what it will prioritize during its term. That brings us to today.

Today, you will hear what your colleagues want to see accomplished in the next four years. Many of the objectives you will hear about today can be achieved through collaboration, determination, and collective creativity, which is at the essence of consensus government. After today, the next steps for the priority setting process include meeting about priorities with

Indigenous governments as well as community and non-governmental organizations, reviewing common priorities and themes that have been identified through all these meetings and associated cost estimates, receiving thorough briefings on the GNWT finances, contributing to an exercise where you will aim to reach consensus on your priorities, and finally tabling the priorities of the 20th Assembly in this House in February of next year. From there, the GNWT will develop its final budget and associated mandate with your input.

Now, on to a few housekeeping items.

Today's proceedings are open to the public and are also being broadcast on television and social media. You have agreed to limit your speeches today to 10 minutes. There is no need to use all of this time, and I will not interrupt you if you go over time. However, I would remind you to please be mindful of the time and the number of Members who wish to speak today. I will also ask that you please stand to deliver your speech.

We will take a 15-minute break at approximately 10:30 this morning, and we're expecting the proceedings to wrap up around 12:30. Members will indicate when they wish to speak and will be called upon by myself as the presiding officer. Thank you, Members. It is now time to begin.

We'll begin with the Member for Kam Lake.

Round Table Speeches by Members**MS. CAITLIN CLEVELAND'S SPEECH**

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. And thank you, colleagues. It's a great honour to stand in this House again and represent the people of Kam Lake. I want to thank Kam Lake residents for their continued support and trust.

I start today by speaking about trust because I want to begin by identifying my three personal priorities: our relationships with one another, our relationships with the public service, and our relationships with future Assemblies.

The foundation of every relationship is trust. I started the 19th Assembly speaking in this House about trust. Trust is both fragile and powerful, built over time, but easily and quickly broken. Building trust requires us to understand the unique challenges of our people, the curiosity and empathy to care, and the courage to do what is right. Trust is a feedback loop of not only gaining trust but also giving it both inside the House, within departments, other levels of government and community organizations, and within our own neighbourhoods. Trust allows us to have each others backs, work side by side, and advance with confidence towards a common purpose. This doesn't mean this space will be void of conflict. Conflict is healthy, and we rely on it to advocate for the people we serve with integrity.

Second, Mr. Clerk, is our relationship with the public service. To reach our political goals, we rely on public service. It is inherent in every one of us to want to do meaningful, respected work. The public service needs to be empowered to do innovative and collaborative work toward our common goals. I want a public service empowered to dream big and be accountable and driven by visible, progressive results.

Third is our relationship with future Assemblies. I'm frequently asked about working in Canada's first gender-balanced Legislature. Given that roughly 13 percent of elected seats worldwide are held by women, I don't discount the significance. But women don't want to be remembered or celebrated because of their gender but instead because of the work they do. That said, there's a deeper conversation to be had about what representation in this House truly means and reflect on who is not at the table. Are we missing entrepreneurs? Health care workers? Educators? People with disabilities? Mixed incomes, or gender diverse and two-spirited Northerners?

Mr. Clerk, priority speeches in general are difficult. Each of us could each fill a day talking about the intertwined connectedness of each of our platforms, what we heard at the doors, and the individual yet related issues of constituents. It's a fine balance trying to ensure residents hear their own voices in our speeches today while ensuring we are setting ourselves up for access with fewer priorities for the 20th Assembly. I do not believe our issues are discrete, nor can they be addressed one at a time in a vacuum. But I do think that our common priority trends, shared by the people we serve, and I look forward to see those emerge today.

Mr. Clerk, my election campaign, again, centered on three pillars: people, land, and prosperity. And together they were defined by

18 outcomes that put people first, provided stewardship of our living planet, and fostered economic growth and diversification. But I'm not going to take you through my platform. My constituents have been generous with their opinions through social media, family-friendly chats at the fieldhouse, and door-to-door conversations. So today I will take you through the common priorities that I have heard so far from Kam Lake residents that centre on cost of living, economy, accessible health care, and climate adaptability and resilience.

The escalating cost of living was a top priority for the people of Kam Lake. Many people reflected on the cost of food and goods and services but also acknowledged that this is a trend impacting much of Canada. Many Kam Lake residents agreed that energy and housing infrastructure were their top cost of living priorities. Kam Lake residents want the government to develop clean affordable energy systems to reduce diesel dependency. Yellowknife residents are paying premium rates and subsidizing small communities for expensive archaic infrastructure shared with the rest of the NWT and with oil reliance on diesel generators given the low water levels. The frustration of residents is further propelled by the carbon tax given there is limited ability to affordably and sustainably choose alternative energies.

Kam Lake residents, including young families, people -- sorry, young people, families, senior and elders, also tied affordable accessible housing to cost of living. People are finding it difficult to remain housed or visualize the long-term certainty and sustainability of living in the North, especially after retirement is pushing more people to explore southern housing options. I stand by my words of the 19th Assembly and believe housing needs to be looked at as the big infrastructure opportunity that it is. We need to incentivize affordable housing solutions through public and private partnership with major capital investments.

Second, most residents spoke about the economy. As a base, many of the people I serve are entrepreneurs or work within private industry that serves the entire Northwest Territories. They are concerned with the state of the economy across the territory now stressed by COVID-19, climate events, and the approaching deadlines of mine closures.

There are several parts to a thriving economic system. So in no particular order we need to increase the number of well-paid northern residents who call the NWT home and are able to buy goods and services right here. We need to do this by educating self-confident and self-reliant youth graduating empowered to join

our changing workforce, encouraging and welcoming our students to return North and incentivizing others to move here.

Second, we need to continue to identify business opportunities for the things people need and want in industries from mining to northern art to green energy and local food production to energy retrofits of public infrastructure. There are so many opportunities for creative innovation in our territory that would be served by focusing on accountability for achieving outcomes rather than focusing on compliance with procedure or policy that exists today.

Third, we are and have always been reliant on mining. Investors need clean affordable reliable energy in a certain and timely regulatory environment.

Finally, housing is key input to business costs. So many times people have not been able to move North because there's no housing. I have heard from Kam Lake businesses on multiple occasions they cannot afford to dream because they do not have the staff to realize those dreams because either they cannot find these staff, or those staff can't find affordable places to live.

Beyond this, what do working Northerners need? Childcare. We need to fully implement universal childcare and support fair compensation to the sector.

Third, many Kam Lake residents shared frustrations that related to accessible health care and social services. Residents expressed concern about accessing health care providers and mental health supports, concerns of medical travels financial supports, access to escorts and unfair process, and public safety within our city that directly relates to the NWT's need for an accessible client-focused integrated service delivery system that includes, housing, health, education, employment, income support, and community justice that pairs with healing and addictions and aftercare supports.

Mr. Clerk, we can't discuss mental health without talking about sport and recreation. When engaging with communities on child and family services, suicide prevention, and homelessness prevention, the 19th Assembly's Standing Committee on Social Development found that access to sport and recreation was a common recommendation from residents. Sport and recreation is a key component of healthy communities so we can't talk about mental health without raising the alarm on the quiet crisis coming our way. Much of our infrastructure was built within the same

timeframe and is coming due. This territory needs an infrastructure deficit recovery plan and to address the municipal funding gap.

Climate adaptability and resilience were next up on the list. This summer the city of Yellowknife made history when it was evacuated. As expected, residents have questions, want to participate in a third party review to share their experiences, and want to see improvements in how this territory mitigates and manages emergencies. Beyond emergency management, residents want to see the GNWT support a culture shift to become leaders in adaptability and resilience in a climate change environment.

So in many more words than four, Mr. Clerk, the priorities I have ultimately identified today are:

1. Cost of living, where Kam Lake residents tied this to developing clean energy solutions and affordable accessible housing;
2. The economy through which residents also identified affordable clean energy infrastructure and affordable housing along with education, population retention, childcare, and certainty;
3. Accessible health care where the people I serve highlighted medical travel reform and responsive client-centered integrated service delivery, especially for vulnerable residents; and,
4. Climate adaptability and resilience where many Kam Lake residents reflected on a timely need to improve mitigation and management of emergencies while supporting a resilience-based culture shift.

Ultimately, Mr. Clerk, every single Northerner wants to make a difference, whether it is in our own home, our workplace, our neighbourhood, or our community. My top priority is to see the work we do positively reflected on the ground and in the lives of Northerners and that together we do just that, make a difference. In doing so, I hope we earn the trust of Northerners not just as independents but also as an institution. Northerners need to trust that their words, concerns, and passions for their home are reflected through our work and ultimately our legacy. Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. If Members do want to be able to have -- are having issues hearing, I understand your desk one, your portable one, is now working on channel 1. And there's a volume control on the side. So channel 1. Thank you.

Next, I have the Member for Hay River North.

MR. R.J. SIMPSON'S SPEECH

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to speak about the priorities that have been informed by my eight years as an MLA; four as a Regular Member, four as a Minister, as well as, and most importantly, what I've heard from my constituents, the constituents of Hay River North. And so I think it's important to give some context about what Hay River has been through in the past five years.

In 2019, we saw the closure of the Hay River high rise. 130 people woke up with homes and went to bed homeless. Overnight, a building with 124 units was shut down. That has had such a major impact on the community. There were always vacancies in that building and so if a business wanted to bring someone into town, that person could find a place to live. So with that closure, we saw a massive impact on an already short housing situation.

That was followed shortly by COVID. For two years, Hay River experienced COVID, just like the rest of the territory, but I would say it was more divisive in Hay River than anywhere else. And the community is still healing from those wounds. That was followed the next year by what was, at the time, the biggest natural disaster in the history of the NWT, the flood. 500 homes in Hay River, KFN, damaged or destroyed. Mr. Speaker, there are elders who were in their late 80s when that happened. They're now in their early 90s, and they've been living a hotel room for the past year and a half. One resident had his 90th birthday at the evacuation centre here in Yellowknife actually and that's because this year, again, we were evacuated. The entire community evacuated. Not once, but twice. Three times in less than a year and a half, Mr. Speaker.

While this was all going on, we also saw an influx -- sorry, Mr. Chair. While this was all going on, we also saw an influx of illicit drugs into the community and new types of drugs. And not just drugs but tainted drugs. And we saw a number of deaths in the community. At least half a dozen directly attributed to toxic drugs and an additional maybe four or five additional deaths that probably wouldn't have -- might not have occurred without those drugs. This has become a very serious issue. And with those drugs, there's also organized crime now moving into the community.

During this entire time, we've also experienced health care shortages, health care professional shortages. There have been times when we've had zero physicians in our community. Meanwhile, every other regional centre has two

or three or four or, you know, a number of health care physicians in the community at any given time. How is it that the second largest community in the territory which serves, you know, a number of communities in the region does not have physicians, Mr. Chair?

So this is the background that Hay River is dealing with right now. And so it's no surprise that the biggest concerns that I heard going door to door, and just living in the community, was the safety and security of our residents. At the bare minimum, the government needs to provide a safe and secure environment for residents. Residents need to feel as though they can live in their community. With constant disasters, with constant evacuations, with being out of our homes for two months this year, Mr. Chair, residents don't feel safe or secure anymore. And so those are the issues that we need to address. We need to ensure that we are doing our job to protect communities from disasters and emergencies through planning, preparation, mitigation, and proper investments. And, you know, the government finances, while they are stable, we can't keep expanding. And so I don't think there are lots of areas that we can make new investments in but this is one of the areas that we need to make investments in. If we built homes, if we have measures in place that prevent damage from happening, in the long run that saves us money.

We need to deal with our health issues in the community. People are moving because there are no physicians, and they don't feel safe. We have many seniors who don't feel safe because they don't trust that if they get sick, they will be taken care of.

And we need to deal with the crime and the drugs in the community as well. The RCMP, they love nothing more than busting bad guys but over the years, they've had a number of the tools they traditionally use taken away from them by changes to the Criminal Code, by decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada, and so as a territorial government we need to look at what we can do to support the RCMP as they try to address drugs and organized crime. So there's legislation that we can enact. Things like the scan legislation, civil forfeiture legislation, a trespass act.

We also need to look at our housing policies. I hear many complaints that there are residents in housing units who, you know, have a brand new truck and new skidoos and everything out front, and everyone knows that that's the drug dealer's house. So why are they in a social housing unit paying \$80 a month? We need to change our housing policies to ensure that that doesn't happen. And ultimately, drugs are not a criminal issue. It's a public health issue. And so

we need to look at how we're going to address that. We've had a number of treatment centres in the territory. The territorial treatment centre system doesn't appear to have worked for us. So what else can we do? And I think that if we are investing our limited resources that we need to look at aftercare. People can go away to treatment. They can get treatment but when they come home, what are they coming back to? They might come back to homelessness. They might be couch surfing on their friend's couch who, you know, parties all the time. It doesn't take long to fall back into it if we don't address the aftercare part of it.

We also need to look at housing. It needs to be a priority. And this is true across Canada but especially true here in the territory. And there's lots of talk about social housing, but it's not just social housing. We need market housing as well and especially in communities like Hay River. If we have more market housing, that'll free up some of our social housing. The town and the Government of the Northwest Territories have worked on a housing strategy, and I think it's a good strategy, and it's something that we need to support, and we need to encourage. It's not something that can just sit on a shelf.

And speaking of housing, we also need to simplify and accelerate the process of returning displaced residents to their home. Earlier, I spoke about someone in their 90s who's been living in a hotel for a year and a half, coming up two years. Many people have gone through the process of, you know, repairing or replacing their homes. They've managed to get through that relatively complicated process, but not everyone has. And we need to ensure that we are taking care of everybody. And I could go through a number of different examples of cases that I've been working on, with the former MLA from Hay River have been working on, and, you know, those are our friends, they're our family, they're our community members, and they're heartbreaking stories and we need to do better to address them.

The government's finances, I mentioned that, you know, we're not in a terrible fiscal situation but we need to rein in government growth. We cannot continue to grow at the rate we've been growing. I don't think we need to make massive cuts but I think the government is stretched too thin. We've tried to do too many things, and we're doing them halfway. We need to focus our efforts on doing what things that are important. We need to get back to basics and ensure that we are delivering the services, providing the safety and security and the health care and the housing to residents that they need. We need to focus our efforts, get things done, and not do things halfway.

One of the ways to do that is with ensuring that we continue what we started in the last government with government procurement. When I was a Regular Member in the 18th Assembly, I was quite frustrated seeing all of the contract dollars from the GNWT flow to southern companies. There are many things in the economy that are outside of our control. How we spend our money is in our control. By that last year, when I was a regular Member, 75 percent of contract dollars from the GNWT were going south. This last government, the last two full years that we have data for, 75 percent of contract dollars were given to northern businesses. So we've completely flipped that, and we need to make sure that we continue that.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, reconciliation. That is going to be the cornerstone -- that should be the cornerstone of the upcoming government in my opinion. I believe we made some changes to negotiating mandates to how we approach Indigenous governments, and I believe we can finalize a couple of agreements in the next four years. You know, we can't continue this cycle. And we need to recognize that in 50 years, the territory's going to look much different than it does now. What is the GNWT's goal going to be in 50 years? You know, Indigenous governments are already taking on more responsibility, and they want to take on more responsibility, and so we need to start working with Indigenous governments now in a completely different way to ensure that when we develop legislation, programs, policies that the Indigenous governments are comfortable with it and those are the policies and legislation that they want to at some point take on responsibility for and administer. That means that we might have to do less because it does take time to work together but that is important. That is one of the most important things I think that can come out of this government.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that one of my last priorities is to just make government easier for people. I hear of elders who need to fill out multiple forms to get assistance to basically do the same thing to their home, to get repairs to their homes, to get upgrades to their homes. I hear of -- I see the clock is ticking.

So I hear a number of things like this. What we need to do is give direction to government that when they are designing programs, policies, and legislation, that they focus on the end user, whether that's residents, whether that's businesses, we need to focus on designing legislation, policies, and programs for the people and not for government. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Rutland): Thank you, Member for Hay River North. Next, I have the Member for Hay River South.

MR. VINCE MCKAY'S SPEECH

MR. McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. During my remarks, I aim to address some critical priorities impacting our residents, my community, and the region.

It is evident that our government is falling short in serving our communities and the NWT Indigenous government organizations. Much of what I am going to say, it may resonate with fellow colleagues and their ridings. You won't hear no big territorial projects from me other than funding a territorial trauma treatment centre and regional aftercare support programs in existing facilities; however, you will hear more about the need of fine tuning our government programs and services and invest in our communities and the infrastructure deficit. This approach is intended to stimulate the local economy through community-based employment rather than benefitting distant southern corporations that leave without spending a dime in our communities.

My community, like others, struggle with health care issues, education concerns, formula funding for the town of Hay River, funding nonprofit groups, and criminal activities. These were also key points during my campaign trail. However, we still face issues with the wildfires, flood problems that remain unaddressed, and proper dredging of waterways and MTS issues.

A project that could have detrimental effects on my community and the territory if not completed is the repair of the CN rail line. Our rail access needs to be repaired now, not later, and not next summer. If it doesn't get done in a timely manner, it may not get done at all. Without a rail line, there is a greater risk of a loss to MTS and other companies in Hay River resulting in job loss and residents likely leaving my community. The GNWT is ultimately responsible for leading the discussions with CN and supporting those operations. Without our government taking lead in addressing this, we're are setting up the next shipping season for failure and ultimately our mismanaged wildfires that put us in this situation.

Health care is an ongoing issue in Canada; however, some quick simple assistance from my community is the return of recruitment dollars for doctors to the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority without it having going through Yellowknife. We also need to return Hay River to a community health board and not an appointed public administrator. We need the community interest, not government

interest to take care of us. Our health care -- the health of our residents should be a priority. I will have more to address on this in the coming months.

Regarding the development of the proposed NT polytechnic university, I want to see this project stopped with funding directed back to the Aurora College for improvement, development, and expanding of what we already built. We can't operate what we already have effectively; why build bigger? We need to concentrate on our current education system, our youth, and the communities, not some dream world projects. We need more money to support our current education system. And building new is just wasting money on O and M money we don't have. Some of this money could be used at home and our local schools. I know one of our schools that has an operating budget of \$8,000. Kids are being asked to bring in tissue paper, and parents are asked to pay for school busing. When this is happening, we are failing our teachers and our students. We want higher graduation rates, then fix and support our system.

Our government always has been excuse of why it can't close the gap in funding, or funding formula for the communities. This must stop. And our government needs to work on fixing the formula funding and closing those gaps. It's been far too long of an issue.

Another long outstanding issue is the funding of ambulance services. The town of Hay River, like others, has been providing free ambulance service for the GNWT for years. It's not a legislative responsibility for municipalities to provide these services on the back of local taxpayer dollars. I addressed this issue when I was on town council with MACA more than 20 years ago. I also addressed it through NWTAC through resolution, and all that has happened is studies. The studies are done, now let's get on with it. All the town of Hay River would have to do is stop providing these services for the GNWT to find a solution quickly. I don't think it has to come to this. All we need to do is sit down with the town of Hay River to discuss these issues. I will be addressing these issues repeatedly until they're resolved.

Throughout the territories, organizations like the Hay River biathlon group have had government and lotteries supports taken away from them. Regardless of the excuse, our government must find ways to work with these groups and others like it to keep our youth healthy and give them something to do other than turning to the streets of crime. We are ultimately responsible for a healthy NWT. We need to go to them to find ways to support them, not have them banging at our doorsteps to

support groups with a very minor financial support. We can find ways to charter a plane for a day trip meeting, surely we can find ways to support our system and improve on what we already have.

Over the last ten years, I watched my community lose many GNWT services and jobs. I'm not sure the success of decentralization will ever transpire. This loss is exemplified not only in the loss of some jobs at the court services but also the absence of essential budgeted resources like the K9 unit located in Hay River for the South Slave Region. The K9 unit is vital in the fight against illegal activity and drugs in our community and quickly supports our RCMP members in the South Slave Region. Without essential resources and tools for the RCMP, it leads to an unsafe environment for RCMP staff and residents. Not only did they get inadequate housing, RCMP members in my community lack the supports to keep drug dealers out of our community and the North.

Hay River is unfortunately the hub of the drug trade. It is getting -- if it's getting into Hay River easily, it's also getting into my colleagues' ridings like in Fort Smith, Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, just for a couple examples. Our government needs to be tough on crime. We need to learn not to support criminal activities. Housing is a good example of where we could start. When an eviction order is approved, it doesn't need to sit on the Minister's desk for signature. Our government must take drug dealers and bootleggers out of our houses. Housing programs are a privilege, not a right. We can then utilize houses for those in the real need and are willing to contribute positively to a healthy community and territory. This will also address some of our housing concerns by properly utilizing our housing supports for their intended use, not bootlegging and drug dealing.

Another huge problem in our community is the cost of living. Unless something is done to bring down the cost of living, residents will leave. And slowly our community will die off. There needs to be a change, and we need to look at not only attracting residents but keeping the ones we have. A few items that can assist to bring down the cost of living is legislation. We could put legislation in place that stops price gouging, better utilize Nutrition North funding and approved funding access for northern grown and produced food. We also need to drop the carbon tax. We need an NWT made solution to go to the federal government to drop the carbon tax.

Our local floods and fires have opened the eyes of many people on how unprepared we are as a government. In my 30 years in emergency

services, I can say that I'm not surprised. Our EMO needs more attention. We need to listen to those on the ground to understand how to implement programs to protect our residents. We don't have to look far for examples of our failures, the horrible implementation of the 9-1-1 system and how regional assistant fire marshals report to regional superintendents and not the NWT fire marshal. We must improve the territorial EMO services. I will be bringing forward a motion at an appropriate time to call for a third-party independent review of the two Hay River fire events last year.

Our government needs to learn from its mistakes for the health and safety of our communities. My community of Hay River and our neighbours are hurting. We are losing families to the south. They are moving because they can't take it anymore. Three evacuations in 16 months aren't easy. Even one isn't easy. When Yellowknife loses a family, hardly anyone notices. However, when we lose a family in a small community, we notice as it affects our staffing levels, our volunteers, funding for our schools and territory. When the population drops, so does our transfer dollars. Our government needs to change its way of thinking. Our government should support our communities, ensure all GNWT jobs stay in place and aid local governments and keeping residents healthy and happy through funding programs and addressing local issues.

We must stop building roads for industry. Our current territorial roadways are neglected and in disrepair. We can't keep up on the road maintenance we currently have and provide adequate emergency response on them. If industry wants resources, they should build the roads as they do down south. However, we do need to cut the red tape, work with them, and collaborate with Indigenous government organizations to achieve this. Our economy is an important and vital to our success and working together with industry and all interest groups will keep us on track.

We need to fine tune our government operations and build on what we have. With our already great government programs and great staff, we can create a healthier and improved NWT for all residents. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Next, we'll hear from the Member for Nahendeh. Following that will be the Member for Thebacha.

MR. SHANE THOMPSON'S SPEECH

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. To begin today, I would like to thank the residents

of the Nahendeh personally and humbly for allowing me to represent and serve them for a third term. I have joined the three previous Nahendeh MLAs reaching this milestone. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

I would also like to thank the residents for allowing myself and my team into their homes to discuss what they feel are the priorities for the next four years.

To my team and family, I thank each of you for your support, advice, and encouragement. I realize it was difficult however you were the strength I needed to get through some of these challenges.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally congratulate everyone here for all the hard work you and your teams accomplished in being the voice to represent your riding. There are some here that were acclaimed, however, you were still actively engaged in conversations with your constituents. This is very impressive. I am very much looking forward to working with each of you for the next four years.

Furthermore, I would like to thank everyone who put their name forward to run for these positions. It takes a lot of time and commitment putting your name forward for public office.

Colleagues, each of the six communities in the Nahendeh region have similar and unique issues. This is a summary of what I heard the residents requesting for me to work on for the next four years. I will attempt to keep it high level where possible, however, some of my returning colleagues know that I do sometimes get into the weeds a little bit.

One of our many priorities is to continue working on our relationship with Indigenous governments. The region and communities would like to see the Government of the Northwest Territories come to some resolution with outstanding claims and processes. This process involves three parties and we need to work together, commit to fostering a good working relationship. A large part of this is listening attentively to what people have to share. Hearing and listening to the people often require creativity in addressing concerns, issues, and challenges. Building relationships is a cornerstone to serving which fosters respectful, trusting relationships, which then builds healthy and more productive communities.

I have experienced that trusting relationships that are built on personal and professional integrity. Trust and respect are not entitlements; they are earned. I encourage all parties to be authentic, transparent, honest, and forthright as we work for resolutions

addressing issues, and concerns throughout the progress. Delivery of authentic services to the residents of the Northwest Territories is not accomplished by lip service or a box that can be checked off. Service to our residents is not a cookie cutter approach. I feel and believe personal and professional integrity needs to be the cornerstone of our work and our continuous guidepost.

I feel the Indigenous governments' processes need to be completed which will create certainty for industry and investment in the North. Colleagues, we need to work together for the well-being and self-reliance of our people and communities, valuing our knowledge-keepers and listening to them, paying special attention to their traditional knowledge and meeting their needs for care in the NWT. We need to continue to invest in infrastructure that enhances the well-being of individuals such as long-term four-plex facilities in smaller communities, the enhancement of road structures within the region including the access roads to the smaller communities, chip seal at least forty additional kilometres on Highway No. 1 and additional 20 kilometres on Highway No. 7, remove at least 20 metres of brush and trees on each side of the road.

The creation of energy efficient homes in the smaller communities like what the community of Jean Marie River did in the 18th Assembly, where the Arctic Energy Alliance helped the band and homeowners become more energy efficient.

NWT Housing needs to work with small community governments ensuring and establishing a year-round maintenance program for our elders and knowledge-keepers in their own homes. It horrendous and deplorable when I visit community members' homes and they lack the support that is there to fix their homes.

As we are all aware, the cost of living has skyrocketed, and for this reason another priority is to work with the federal government to ensure the Nutrition North program is more efficient for each of our communities. Each community should have access to this program, especially in the Nahendeh. I have heard we need to create social service positions to help and support our elders. I find this frustrating, as we speak about our elders, but we don't have a support system in place to truly honour and respect them. We need to create a bill and positions to help and support our elders. Our elders are our foundation and we need to honour and respect them. One of the ways we can do this is increasing home care positions in the communities, which will create jobs, enable

us to take care of and support our most vulnerable and marginalized population.

In the last Assembly, we enhanced the seniors fuel subsidy, however, with increases in carbon taxes and fuel costs, we need to add funding to this process to make it more financially stable for our residents.

The Mackenzie Valley Highway needs to see at least an additional 60 kilometres of all-weather road completed, particularly as we see the water levels of the Mackenzie River continue to recede which is having an impact on the resupply services and the shortening of the winter road season. Additionally, we need to reach out to the federal government about expanding this highway all the way to Inuvik. This will have a direct impact on job creation and infrastructure, which will open the regions to exploration consequently reducing the cost of living.

In the last Assembly, we were able to reduce lease payments for all residents. However, the right-based cabins issue requires further examination. We need to continue working with each regional Indigenous government to come up with their definition, but it needs to get done in this Assembly.

Equity leases continue to be an issue. We have made some progress but not enough. It is very frustrating for residents that have these types of leases and this issue needs to be resolved in the next four years.

Previously, I spoke regarding Highway No. 1, this highway needs to be enhanced, bridges fixed and/or replaced, and we need to see at least 40 kilometres of chip seal (20 kilometres on the Fort Providence junction side and 20 kilometres from the Jean Marie turnoff on Highway No. 1 and 20 kilometres on Highway No. 7 from the Fort Liard Junction to Muskeg bridge).

I am aware of the struggles some of the larger centres have with their highways, however, I invite you to drive down our highways to experience the true essence of a gravel road. I give credit to the staff and the contractors who maintain the highways. The crews do a great job with the resources they are given, but we need to do better.

Colleagues, we need to respond to the NWT residents for safe and affordable housing and address the homelessness issue. Public housing units have a long waiting list and no new infrastructure occurring. When new buildings are built, old buildings are torn down, this is when we need to advocate for those buildings to be renovated which will support the homeless situation. We need to continue

encouraging and working with our Indigenous governments to access federal funding. This Assembly, we saw more money and housing units come to the NWT. We need to work on our elders' housing so that their homes are enhanced and maintained to allow the elders to age in place. Elders do not want to leave their home communities, so we need to ensure we give them that opportunity. For the smaller communities, we need to build four-plexes where elders can be taken care of in the comforts of their home. They are the knowledge-keepers, the ones who hold the history and the culture and wisdom. We need to respect them, build these homes, especially for elders that are stage 1 and stage 2 care. For stages 3 to 5, we need medical services as we do not have that presently.

With the reality that our debt is approximately \$1.6 billion, and it is approaching our debt ceiling of \$1.8 billion, we need to do something differently.

Residents have requested to continue to have the Finance Minister reach out to Northerners to hear their concerns and their ideas on how to improve the GNWT economy and how to utilize the budget. The GNWT needs to examine the number of employment positions and analyze if these positions need to exist, and if they can be regionalized. This past Assembly, residents saw more contracts awarded to northern contractors which supported local northern economy, providing employment and further enhanced skills. These contractors are invested in local and our community as many of our contractors and residents themselves. Residents are looking forward to seeing the new and improved procurement policy and see how it supports the business moving forward.

Mr. Clerk, I realize that time is going fast and I have a number of pages that I need to complete to read, but with your permission I would like to have them deemed as read for the transcript. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We need to continue to develop infrastructure and the economy in a way that we can support a positive future for our people and our land. We need creative ways to enhance tourism outside of the larger centres. The North offer a rich and diverse cultural and traditional perspective and experience, coupled with the incredible untouched landscape that few people have the pleasure of enjoying. Unfortunately, the larger centres are the only places many of our tourists can visit because of the undeveloped northern tourism industry. Moving forward, I would like to see the GNWT develop more green projects, such as geothermal, LNG and solar to reduce the demand on diesel. Essentially, the priority is to

work with the communities to come up with a plan that meets their needs, along with using modern technology to enhance existing systems currently in place. We need to work with northern innovators to help us move forward. I believe the utilization of green energy products would enhance the local economy. Last Assembly, I spoke about examining the concept of geothermal in the Nahendeh; not only can it operate the power plant, but the heat can also be utilized to heat buildings and greenhouses where we could grow our own food. Geothermal creates more employment opportunities and careers, lowers the cost of living in the community, and creates a more self-reliant community.

Colleagues, we need to support education and training initiatives that provide children, youth, and adult learners opportunities for positive contributions to society and meaningful employment. We need to review and address the educational system in the North. We need to repair our educational system to ensure our students get the same education as the larger centers. The divisional education board needs to be responsible and accountable to the Minister and not only to the board. There is a role for the divisional education council and DEA to ensure local voices are heard but our overall goal must be focused on the education of our children and youth; this is our next generation. Unfortunately, many of our families have left because they were not satisfied with the quality of education their children were receiving, consequently, they have left our Northern economy. We need to put our students and communities first by offering local skills and trades training which will reduce our need for importing skilled laborers. We need to promote and stress trades and apprenticeship programs in our communities for our people. We need to develop a physical literacy strategy for the schools and communities.

We need to focus on health prevention and our residents overall well-being. We are behind the rest of Canada in this area. Being respectful of the time, I will try to summarize some of the remaining ideas that I have heard for the past four years and on the campaign trail. Government renewal with all the programs identified, this work needs to be completed in the next 16 months of the new government. There are many unfunded positions within departments, and we need to see if these positions are needed. If they are, they need to be added to the budget. If not, have them removed.

MACA needs to update the NWT Emergency Plan, which requires the GNWT to enhance community government training, and increases capacity for emergency response and

evacuations across all NWT communities. Organizational changes are needed but at a minimum, we need to build the regional and Headquarter capacity. There are four designate authorities in the Nahendeh. All designate authorities are approximately 95 percent Indigenous, but they are not treated the same as reserves in Canada and the NWT.

The GNWT needs to work with Indigenous Service Canada to treat these communities properly and provide them with increase funding and land. ECC developing a combination of firebreaks and prescribed burns around communities is essential. We need to work with private businesses to cut the trees for business opportunities and a prescribed burn of the left over which would build bigger firebreaks. As the elders explained to me, this was done previously to protect their community or assets. We need to reach out to the federal government to get increase funding to help with the firebreaks around the forested communities and have the Department of ECC and MACA obtain increased funding to assist them in these initiatives.

Health and social services - Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. This Assembly needs to seriously look at realigning the Department of Health and Social Services and the NTHSSA. We need to examine how this structure is operating. The rationale was it was going to streamline the process and reduce operating costs has not worked. The reality is, health and social services/NTHSSA is so busy with patient care that areas such as child protection does not get the attention it requires. I want this Assembly to seriously consider a department of health that focuses on providing health services and medical travel.

In reference to medical travel; we need to work with Indigenous Services Canada to fix the shortfall that we receive for our Indigenous population. ISC only provides a small amount of reimbursement of the total costs. We, as a government, need to hold the Government of Canada accountable in supporting the Indigenous people of the NWT. For example; they do not supply certain things like dental and medical support for smaller communities. This needs to be addressed and stopped once and for all. In regard to medivacs, we need to see an increase in service. Waiting for 5 to 12 hours for a flight is not appropriate or acceptable. We need to action this immediately; it is about our people's lives. There are several options such as, an additional plane or, work with regional airlines to provide this service, to ensure our patients get to the regional health centres, for better support until they can be transported to Yellowknife or Edmonton. The second part of

this would be the development of a Department of Social Services that would be a realignment of services, child and family services, adult social work, adoption and foster care; income support, and the senior fuel subsidy program. The common denominator is serving the vulnerable population, combining the supports to address the marginalized population will ensure families have access to resources and supports necessary to help their families be healthy and happy. Infrastructure The next Assembly needs to focus its efforts and budget on one major infrastructure project. I strongly feel this is the Mackenzie Valley Highway to be constructed all the way to Tsiigehtchic. This needs to include building a bridge at Fort Simpson - the Liard River Crossing. There are many factors that makes this the perfect project: This would aid with Canadian sovereignty in the North, connecting isolated communities (all-season access route), economic diversification, increased tourism, small business potential and promoting further development and exploration of the natural resource in the region. Each community in the Nahendeh has a list of initiatives that need to address and work on, however, with permission, I would like to submit the list for the Hansard and have it deemed as read.

What I heard from the constituents that we need to work on in the next four years: Fort Simpson Continue working on improve funding for Edehzhie through the PFP process Medical Travel – address the short fall to NIHB that the Federal Government gives the GNWT and increase per diem rates, accommodations for patients and nonmedical escorts As part of the MVH project, work with the Federal and Territorial to implement the feasibility study for the bridge over the Liard River Increasing Housing Stock in the community and work with the Indigenous governments to access the rapid housing funding Advocate Housing NWT to get out of market rent business and turn those unit for low-cost housing unit. Social service positions for elder Address the education system in the community and have it accountable to the Minister of Education Support the village as they reach out to the federal government to address the bank erosion issue Advocate and stress to the GNWT to build the new long-term care facility and health centre off the island (new jobs) NTPC – Build the new LNG Plant off the island and then have the Plant moved off the island

continue to advocate and stress that the GNWT continue to enhance Highway Number 1 by adding 40 kilometres of chip seal, fix the culvert system at Redknife and replace the bridge at checkpoint Advocate that MACA continue to enhance their EMO Division/Regional staff and

work with the community to enhance and build their emergency plan Work with MACA, NWTAC and ECC to help the community to work on and build a fire break Continue to address the land lease issues (equity and recreational) Work with the Department of ECE and Health and Social Services on coming up with enhanced funding to keep the LKRHS lunch program operational Bring Ministers into the community to hear the concerns, issues and ideas directly from the residents with approval from leadership Receive, review, and advocate for constituents; issues, territorial and federal and continuously be responsive to constituent needs Fort Liard Working with Health and Social Services and DHSSA to access medical services in BC (formalize agreement with the BC Government) including Medical Travel where possible Medical Travel – address the short fall to NIHB that the Federal Government gives the GNWT and increase per diem rates, accommodations for patients and nonmedical escorts Advocate that MACA continue to enhance their EMO Division/Regional staff and work with the community to enhance and build their emergency plan Work with MACA, NWTAC and ECC to help the community to work on and build a firebreak Increase home care in the community Have the Local Housing Authority O & M and office transferred to the Development Corp Increasing Housing Stock in the community and work with the Indigenous Government to access the rapid housing funding Work on LNG and geothermal pilot projects Continue to advocate for chip seal from the Fort Liard Conjunction to Muskeg and continue to have enhancement to Highway No. 7 Continue to keep the Highway No. 7 maintenance contract stay in the community Continue to work to get a full allotment of social service workers in the community Bring Ministers into the community to hear the concerns, issues and ideas directly from the residents with approval from leadership Receive, review, and advocate for constituents' issues whether they are community, regional, territorial, and federal in nature and continuously be responsive to constituent needs

Jean Marie River: Work with Department of Infrastructure on enhancements to section of the access road Work with Department of Infrastructure on the maintenance contract for the access road and airport stays with the community Work with the federal government and Department of MACA on appropriate funding for Designate Authorities such as EMO Funding, Capital, and Governance Highway No. 1 chip sealing project, an additional 20 kilometres from the community junction four-plex for elders Medical Travel – address the short fall to NIHB that the Federal

Government gives the GNWT and increase per diem rates, accommodations for patients and nonmedical escorts Advocate that MACA continue to enhance their EMO Division / Regional staff and work with the community to enhance and build their emergency plan Work with MACA, NWTAC and ECC to help the community to work on to build a firebreak. Work with Department of Infrastructure, MACA, federal government, and the Band to build an emergency access road Increasing Housing Stock in the community and work with the Indigenous Government to access the rapid housing funding Work with the Council to ensure the Lue Tue Sulai (Five Fish Lakes) candidate area is being brought forth and complete in the next four years bring Ministers into the community to hear the concerns, issues and ideas directly from the residents with approval from leadership Receive, review, and advocate for constituents' issues whether they are community, regional, territorial, and federal in nature and continuously be responsive to constituent needs.

Nahanni Butte: Work with the Local DEA and Band Council to get grade 12 into the community Working with Health and Social Services and DHSSA to access medical services in BC (formalize agreement with the BC Government) including Medical Travel where possible Medical Travel – address the short fall to NIHB that the Federal Government gives the GNWT and increase per diem rates, accommodations for patients and nonmedical escorts Work with Department of Infrastructure on enhancements to section of the access road Work with Department of Infrastructure on the maintenance contract for the access road, ice crossing and airport stays with the community Advocate that MACA continue to enhance their EMO Division / Regional staff and work with the community to enhance and build their emergency plan Work with MACA, NWTAC and ECC to help the community to work on to build a firebreak. Work with Department of Infrastructure, MACA, federal government and the Band to build an extend the access road by 200 extra metres Increasing Housing Stock in the community and work with the Indigenous Government to access the rapid housing funding Work with EIA, the federal government and Band to establish municipal boundaries and get some band land Work with the federal government and Department of MACA on appropriate funding for Designate Authorities such as EMO Funding, Capital, and Governance Four-plex for elders Bring Ministers into the community to hear the concerns, issues, and ideas directly from the residents with approval from leadership Receive, review, and advocate for constituents' issues whether they are community, regional,

territorial, and federal in nature and continuously be responsive to constituent needs

Sambaa Ke: Work on developing a regional wellness program for residents that have addictions Medical Travel – address the short fall to NIHB that the Federal Government gives the GNWT and increase per diem rates, accommodations for patients and non-medical escorts Work with Department of Infrastructure on enhancements to section of the access road Work with Department of Infrastructure on the maintenance contract for the access road and airport stays with the community Advocate that MACA continue to enhance their EMO Division / Regional staff and work with the community to enhance and build their emergency plan Work with the Council to ensure the candidate area is being brought forth and complete in the next four years with ECC Work with MACA, NWTAC and ECC to help the community to work on to build completing the firebreak. Work with Department of Infrastructure, MACA, federal government, and the Band to build a road to access the local gravel sources Increasing Housing Stock in the community and work with the Indigenous Government to access the rapid housing funding Work with EIA, the federal government and Band to establish municipal boundaries and get some band land Work with the federal government and Department of MACA on appropriate funding for Designate Authorities such as EMO Funding, Capital, and Governance Work with the Local DEA and Band Council to get grade 12 into the community Bring Ministers into the community to hear the concerns, issues, and ideas directly from the residents with approval from leadership Receive, review, and advocate for constituents' issues whether they are community, regional, territorial, and federal in nature and continuously be responsive to constituent needs Wrigley Work with the Department of Infrastructure to start work on the Mackenzie Valley Highway from Wrigley to Mount Gaudet for the benefit of both the residents and visitors Medical Travel – address the short fall to NIHB that the Federal Government gives the GNWT and increase per diem rates, accommodations for patients and non-medical escorts Work with Department of Infrastructure on enhancements to section of the access road and winter road Work with Department of Infrastructure on the maintenance contract for the access road and airport stays with the community Advocate that MACA continue to enhance their EMO Division / Regional staff and work with the community to enhance and build their emergency plan Work with MACA, NWTAC and ECC to help the community to work on to build completing the firebreak. Work with Department of

Infrastructure, MACA, federal government, and the Band to build a road to access the local gravel sources Increasing Housing Stock in the community and work with the Indigenous Government to access the rapid housing funding Work with the federal government and Department of MACA on appropriate funding for Designate Authorities such as EMO Funding, Capital, and Governance Bring Ministers into the community to hear the concerns, issues, and ideas directly from the residents with approval from leadership Receive, review, and advocate for constituents' issues whether they are community, regional, territorial, and federal in nature and continuously be responsive to constituent needs.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Next, we'll hear from the Member for Thebacha, followed by the Member for Range Lake.

MR. MACDONALD'S SPEECH

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Clerk, and welcome colleagues. I am profoundly grateful to my family, the residents of Thebacha, and my dedicated team for their unwavering support and commitment throughout my election campaign to the 20th Assembly of the Northwest Territories. Your encouragement, tireless efforts, and belief in my vision have been instrumental in achieving this milestone. This victory is not only a personal triumph but a collective success that reflects the strength of our bonds and shared aspirations. I am honoured to have such a resilient and supportive network, and I carry the responsibility with deep humility.

As I embark on this new journey, I look forward to continuing our collective efforts drawing inspiration from the unity that brought us to success. Thank you for being the pillars of my journey. I am eager to serve the constituents of Thebacha and the people of the Northwest Territories with dedication and passion.

Mr. Clerk, now more than ever we must recognize the urgency for change. No government can go it alone, and the status quo is not sustainable. And the time has come to challenge the norms that have held us back. The economic landscape is evolving rapidly, and we must adapt. The bureaucratic processes that once may have served a purpose, now threaten to impede progress at a time when agility and innovation are critical. I propose a decisive shift in our approach. A commitment to untangle the red tape and streamline our bureaucratic processes. We must prioritize efficiency, transparency in a business-friendly environment that attracts

investment and fosters economic development. It's time to simplify procedures, eliminate unnecessary regulations, and empower Indigenous governments, the regions, our communities, and the business sector to thrive.

We must embrace innovation. Our journey towards economic revitalization demands that we embrace innovation not only in our industries but also in the way we govern. Technology offers us the tools to create a more efficient and responsive bureaucracy. Let us leverage these advancements to reduce paperwork, enhance communications, and create a government that works hand in hand with business, not against them.

The issues of settling land claims has created a barrier to success. We must address the issues of settling land claims. Our relationship with Indigenous communities is foundational to the success and well-being of the Northwest Territories.

I envision a future where we work collaboratively to settle outstanding land claims, respecting the rights and traditions of Indigenous peoples. Through open dialogue and understanding, we can forge a path towards reconciliation, fostering unity and harmony among all residents. The collaborative approach to self-government and land negotiations must follow a well-defined process to ensure efficiencies and commitment initiated by our government lead appointed at the ministerial level. The process must emphasize political commitment through a nation-to-nation kickoff meeting, securing agreements from both territorial and Indigenous leadership, a specific timeline needs to be set, and a negotiation mandate must be loosely defined to allow for a broad set of goals in the interest-based approach encourages joint crafting of solutions within negotiated meetings.

Focusing on shared interests rather than fixed positions, a federal role needs to be engaged in areas directly relevant to federal considerations and reporting structures ensuring timely communications without bureaucratic delays, an independent chief negotiator reporting directly to the Minister or deputy minister could lead negotiations with timely updates to Cabinet proposing solutions to develop collaboratively with Indigenous governments and partners. Cabinet provides timely feedback and final negotiated agreements follow with the usual government approvals and processes within the involved system. This approach ensures a streamlined and effective negotiation process, minimizing bureaucracy, bureaucratic hurdles, and maintaining political engagement throughout.

Mr. Clerk, I want to draw your attention to a critical aspect of my vision for the Northwest Territories.

The intersection of an economic prosperity and energy sustainability as we navigate the global urgency to combat climate change, I propose a visionary approach involving a sustainable investment in renewable energy sources. Our economic well-being is undeniably linked to the sustainability of our energy practices. In light of the increasing frequency of natural disasters, shifts in seasonal patterns, and the broader impacts of climate change, it is crucial that we take decisive action. My vision for the NWT entails a significant commitment to harnessing the power of renewable energies, specifically wind, solar, and hydroelectric sources. By diversifying our energy portfolio, we can reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, mitigate environmental impact, and contribute to a greener more sustainable future.

Wind and solar energy harnessed from the vast landscapes of the Northwest Territories hold immense potential. Additionally, our rivers offer opportunities for expanded hydroelectric projects ensuring a clean and reliable source of power. The reality of longer summers and shorter winter road seasons underscores the urgency of adapting our energy infrastructure to a changing climate. Renewable energy sources not only offer environmental benefits but also enhance the resilience of our energy created in the face of evolving weather patterns. This strategic investment will position the NWT as a leader in sustainable energy practices. Attracting investments and fostering innovation in the emerging green economy. Implementing micro grids in the communities of the Northwest Territories is a visionary step toward regional and local sustainability. By leveraging local labour development through partnerships with Indigenous and local governments, institutions like Aurora College, we can foster economic growth and empower residents with the skills needed for the renewable energy sector. Micro grids provide a decentralized and resilient energy solution, reducing reliance on traditional power sources, and mitigating environmental impact. This vision not only addresses energy security but also creates job opportunities within the communities that aligns with our community to environmental stewardship, economic empowerment, and the sustainable development of our regions, ensuring that brighter and more sufficient future for all. The shift to renewable energy aligns with our commitment to global climate goals. It is a proactive step forward to reducing our carbon footprint demonstrating responsible stewardship of our natural resources in securing a brighter more sustainable future for

generations to come. Addressing the housing crisis demands a comprehensive and collaborative strategy that engages multiple stakeholders. It is critical to recognize and empower Indigenous communities, ensuring that housing solutions are culturally informed and community driven. Collaborating closely with Indigenous leaders is nonnegotiable for effective and sustainable outcomes. Simultaneously, multiple governments must be empowered to tailor solutions to the specific challenges faced by their residents. Recognizing the constraints of public resources, active engagement with the private sector becomes a key element. By partnering with responsible developers, we can leverage their expertise and resources to maximize the impact of housing initiatives. A unified approach requires collaboration and transparency and a commitment to shared goals among Indigenous and municipal governments and the private sector. This collective effort will optimize resources, ensuring that each investment contributes significantly to addressing the housing needs of our communities.

A short-term solution of the housing crisis involves identifying the existing inventory of vacant housing and making these units available to Indigenous governments, municipalities, and the private sector. By repurposing and officially utilizing these vacant units, we can quickly address the immediate housing needs of our communities. This approach maximizes existing resources providing an expedited response to the housing shortage while more comprehensive long-term strategies are developed and implemented.

Mr. Clerk, substance abuse is becoming a growing problem in the North. The North, with its unique cultural and geographical context, requires a tailored approach to address substance abuse. I advocate for the establishment of culturally sensitive drug and alcohol treatment centres designed specifically for Northerners. These facilities would offer community driven programs recognizing the diverse backgrounds and challenges of those seeking help. Additionally, a comprehensive aftercare program is crucial for sustained recovery providing ongoing support, counselling, vocational assistance, and community engagement initiatives as individuals reintegrate into the communities.

To ensure success, active community involvement and collaboration are essential. I propose a community-based approach that includes local leaders, health care professionals, and community members in designing and implementing these programs, fostering a sense of ownership and

understanding for an effective and sustainable support system.

As my time here, I see, is coming close to the limit, I want to express my deep appreciation for the opportunity to share my vision and proposals with you. While there are numerous areas that demand attention and improvement, I recognize the constraints of time. Our communities and the Northwest Territories are faced with multi-faceted challenges, and addressing them requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort. I want to assure you that my commitment to positive change goes beyond this platform. No government can go it alone. I emphasize the pressing need for change in the face of evolving economic landscape and the urgency to combat climate change. The status quo is no longer sustainable, and I propose a divisive shift in our approach in the pursuit of a brighter and more sustainable future. I am committed to these visionary proposals and look forward to working collaboratively with my colleagues for the benefit of Thebacha and the Northwest Territories. Mahsi, Mr. Clerk.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Kim Wickens): Thank you, Member for Thebacha. We'll now move to the Member for Range Lake who will be followed by the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. KIERON TESTART'S SPEECH

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Clerk. Honourable Members. I rise today representing the citizens of Range Lake, a constituency whose needs and aspirations are at the forefront of my legislative responsibilities. It is with a profound sense of duty and commitment that I stand before you cognizant of the challenges our community faces and the imperative to transcend the rhetoric that has eroded the trust of our constituents. Empty words and unfulfilled promises have marred the public's perception of our political system. It is our duty as representatives of the people to rebuild that trust.

Trust is not bestowed lightly. It must be earned through sincerity, accountability, and most importantly through action. We must move beyond the platitudes and embark on a journey of tangible positive change. To build unity, we must recognize and celebrate the diversity within our community.

Range Lake is a tapestry of voices, each with a unique perspective. Embracing this diversity is not just a moral imperative but a strategic one. In unity, we find strength, and in strength we discover solutions to the multi faceted challenges that lie before us.

I promise to ensure that every citizens' voice is not only heard but valued and brought into a harmonious chorus that drives our progress forward as an Assembly and ensures none of our citizens are left behind by the challenges ahead. The time for action is now. As we deliberate in this esteemed Chamber, our constituents demand more than political posturing. They demand results. Whether it be in health care, economic development, public safety, or the cost of living, our constituents deserve a government that rolls up its sleeves and addresses their concerns head on.

First and foremost, health care is a foundational pillar of our society, and I pledge to advocate for increased funding, improved infrastructure, and enhanced accessibility to ensure that every citizen in Range Lake and the Northwest Territories receives the care they deserve. A healthy community is a thriving community.

Economic development is not a luxury. It is a necessity, especially with precious little time before the slated closure of the diamond mines and limited plans to offset the tremendous losses to our economy. I commit to champion policies that stimulate local businesses, attract investment, reinvigorate our natural resource sector, and generate employment opportunities.

Public safety is paramount. I will tirelessly work towards strengthening our law enforcement agencies and fire departments, providing the necessary resources and support to ensure safety and security of our constituents. Every citizen has the right to feel secure in their homes and their communities. This also means ensuring local governments have the funding and training necessary to protect against unprecedented climate disasters that turned two-thirds of our people into climate refugees mere months ago. We cannot afford or allow a repeat of what happened earlier this year. And I am determined to build the infrastructure and legislative framework that will keep our homes and families safe for decades to come.

As always, cost of living remains a pressing concern for my constituents. Through targeted initiatives, strategic investments, and thoughtful tax reforms, I will work collaboratively with my colleagues in the capital, regional centres, and smaller communities, to explore avenues to alleviate the financial burdens on our families striving to create an environment where the cost of living is not a barrier to fulfilling life irrespective of the demographic size or makeup of a community.

As we embark on this journey together, I must take a moment to reflect on the profound experience of walking the campaign trail. With

my team, I knocked on as many doors as I could in Range Lake, taking 500,000 steps, engaging in hundreds of conversations, and most importantly listening to the voices of my constituents. This experience has shaped the priorities I bring before the House today.

The cadence of those steps mirrored the heartbeat of our neighbourhood. It brought me face-to-face with the realities, aspirations, and concerns of the people I am honoured to represent. Every step was a connection, every conversation an invaluable exchange of ideas, and every voter I met left an indelible mark on the vision I carry into this Chamber. I heard the stories that define us, the dreams that propel us, and the challenges that unite us. The conversations were not just about policy. They were about lives, experience, and the shared desire for a better tomorrow. This human connection forged step by step forms the foundation upon which the priorities I present today are built.

Health care, economic development, public safety, and the cost of living are not abstract concepts for me. They are the resonant echos of the conversations I had on the campaign trail. The steps I took were not just physical exertion. They were a symbolic commitment to being present, engaged, and attuned to the pulse of our communities.

Moreover, the insights gained from these conversations were instrumental in shaping the blueprint of my legislative agenda. The priorities I bring forward are not detached from the lived experience of our constituents. They are a direct response to the concerns voiced on doorsteps and community forums and amidst the vibrant neighbourhoods of Range Lake.

As we deliberate on the policies that will shape our communities' futures, I will continue carrying the spirit of the steps with me. I will remember the faces, the stories, and the shared hopes that have propelled me to this moment with all of you.

My honourable friends, it is with this profound connection to the people we serve that we can truly enact meaningful change.

Madam Clerk, allow me to delve deeper into the imperative task of restoring trust not only within our own constituencies but also with Indigenous nations whose rich histories are interwoven with the fabric of the Northwest Territories, the first and foremost peoples of our land. The erosion of trust borne from years of colonialism, inaction, and a failure to produce tangible results demands our immediate attention. The relationship with our Indigenous nations is of paramount importance. The history

of our land is firmly rooted in these traditions -- in their traditions, wisdom, and their resilience. However, the trust between the government and these nations has been strained by years of unfulfilled promises and a lack of meaningful collaboration.

I commit to engaging in sincere and respectful dialogue with Indigenous leaders. The days of tokenism and symbolic gestures must give way to substantive action. We must recognize the rights of Indigenous nations to self-determination and self-development and actively involve them in the decision-making processes that affect their communities. By fostering genuine partnerships built on trust and mutual respect, we can begin to repair the rift that has persisted for far too long.

Restoring trust is not a passive endeavour. It requires a proactive approach that addresses discontent and dissolutionment. Let us, as elected representatives, write a new chapter in the relationship between the government, the public, and our Indigenous nations, a chapter defined by accountability, transparency, and a commitment to producing tangible positive outcomes.

Before I conclude, Madam Clerk, I must take a moment to express my genuine excitement and optimism for the road ahead. In this House, I am surrounded by colleagues whose skills and backgrounds converge in a symphony of expertise. Our collective experience, coupled with an unwavering commitment to public service, positions us as a force capable of surmounting the challenges that have beset us for far too long. Together we are not merely the voices of our people. We are architects of change that is long overdue. The energy emanating from this Assembly is palpable, and it resonates with the dreams and aspirations of the citizens we are privileged to serve. This is a dream team poised to transcend geographic lines and unite in common purpose, the betterment of the Northwest Territories and the restoration of public trust in our governing institutions. We have an opportunity, a mandate, and a responsibility to forge a path forward into a future that not only meets but surpasses the expectations of those who place their trust in us. Let us not forget what defines us and remember the Northwest Territories is a playground for entrepreneurs, a canvass for dreamers, and a realm of untapped potential for all. Let us harness this potential and create a future where innovation flourishes, where self-starters find the support they need to turn their visions into reality, and where individuals see real opportunities for career advancement within our borders.

In closing, I extend my gratitude to the citizens of Range Lake for giving me the privilege to serve them in this Assembly. Together we will work tirelessly to restore your trust, build unity, and take decisive action to address the most pressing issues facing our communities. Thank you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Kim Wickens): Thank you, Member for Range Lake. We'll now move to the Member for Frame Lake, followed by the Member for Great Slave.

MR. JULIAN MORSE'S SPEECH

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this opportunity for MLAs to share our initial input on what we feel should be the priorities of the 20th Assembly. I see this as a first step in what will be a more robust and complete process than has occurred in the past. Today, I will primarily speak to the platform I put before residents during the election and committed to bring forward if elected. Of course, we are going to hear 19 different perspectives today and are yet to hear from our partnering organizations. So I look forward to coming together with my colleagues to do the difficult and necessary work of forming a collective vision which captures as many perspectives as possible without losing focus.

I want to emphasize my awareness of the fact that it is GNWT's staff who are responsible for implementation of priorities set by MLAs. For this reason, I think it is critically important that we receive staff feedback and advice on how priorities can best be achieved. We also need staff input into measurable and achievable goal setting as part of this process to ensure that MLAs and administration have mutual understanding of what success is expected to look like. We should, where possible, align our goals with work which is already taking place. This will ensure consistency and that we don't lose initiatives staff have put valuable resources towards. However, I want to emphasize that we are going to have to realign some resources to ensure priorities are successful. One of the key failures of past priority setting has been lack of commitment of funding and resources towards ensuring their success.

It is also important to ensure priorities aren't siloed. In the past, a given priority has tended to be connected to a particular department that other departments may not consider how it affects their work and may even inadvertently work against it. We need to pay attention to how departments relate to one another and the role they play in affecting and implementing priorities if they are to be truly successful. I will

now present the priorities I committed to bring to the table.

I am bringing forward two overarching priorities under which I have nested a number of initiatives which will be evolved in achieving them. My first proposed priority is making the Northwest Territories more liveable. It is a fundamentally simple priority however underpins so much of what I've heard from residents during the election and the work GNWT is or should be engaged in. Under this priority, I propose the following initiatives:

Addressing the housing crisis. We need to increase the territorial budget for housing, create a long-term plan in partnership with Indigenous governments and NGOs for increasing housing stock and access and seek stable funding to implement it.

Reducing cost of living. Specifically working to decrease basic living costs for lower income individuals and families who are struggling to make ends meet.

Increasing access to affordable child care and ensuring that changes to federal child care funding do not negatively impact child care providers and parents.

Investing in and evolving the primary health care system to improve health care access and outcomes. This includes mental health and addictions treatment with an emphasis on growing and strengthening aftercare.

Increasing accessibility for person with disabilities and ensuring extended health benefits coverage is comprehensive.

Working to improve outcomes of early childhood education in the K to 12 education system.

Adapting to and mitigating climate change. We need to be better prepared to face the challenges of increasingly extreme environmental changes. As a first step, it is important that an external review of the 2023 wildfire response and community evacuations be done with recommended -- with recommendations for changes to ensure past mistakes are not repeated.

Responding to climate change, if done right, is an opportunity to reduce cost of living, generate any economic activity, and protect the environment for future generations. But decarbonization needs to be done in a way that doesn't put further strain on residents who are already struggling to make ends meet. We need to simplify our climate strategy, prioritizing changes which will most quickly reduce the territory's reliance on diesel. Much of this work

will be at the institutional level, but we can also include programs which help residents make changes that get their private homes off of diesel.

My second proposed priority is economic development and diversification. Under this overarching priority, I propose the following initiatives:

Continue transitioning Aurora College into a university and growing the knowledge economy throughout the territory. This will create jobs, help people build capacity, and bring more funds into the territory.

We need to continue to invest in and develop our tourism and art sectors, both of which have more potential than is currently being realized.

Settling land claims to help Indigenous governments realize the benefits of self-government and the associated benefits of direct federal funding to support those government's authorities and bringing much needed capacity to our regulatory system.

Ensuring that the regulatory system balances the need for environmental protection with economic development and does not prioritize one over the other unreasonably, particularly measures which could be taken to extend the life of existing mining projects should be explored. This would help to ensure employment continuity while other sectors or projects grow over time and ensure maximum benefit is obtained from sites which have already been disturbed.

Ensure procurement favours NWT owned and staffed businesses and helps them grow.

Actively preparing for closure of Diavik Diamond Mine by ensuring employment continuity for residents affected by the closure and that impacts from reduction in contracted activity are minimized.

Maximizing benefits of the growing remediation economy in the territory and ensuring as many residents and local companies benefit from remediation as possible. It's worth noting that in many cases the diversification elements I've spoken to are more about simply capturing benefits from activity that's already occurring here as opposed to creating new activity.

On top of these priorities, I am also proposing several guiding principles to apply generally across the government. I am hoping that together the priorities and guiding principles will speak at a high level to not only what work GNWT prioritizes but how the GNWT will work.

My proposed guiding principles are as follows: One, focusing government services and initiatives on helping those with the highest need first. This may seem like an obvious principle and is already the case for many GNWT programs; however, there are a surprising number of initiatives which end up inadvertently providing assistance in such a way which does not adhere to this principle. Where necessary, we need to refocus programming to ensure we are helping those who are most in need.

My second proposed guiding principle is being flexible, adaptable, and collaborative in our work. Put simply, I would like to see the government shift to more collaborative models of working being solutions oriented, open to change, and less risk adverse.

My third proposed guiding principle is implementing results-based management in our work. The GNWT should, at a bare minimum, be able to explain what value any of its programs are creating for Northerners. Even better is measuring the impact of programs and initiatives and changing and adapting as needed to maximize value and impacts.

The fourth is better characterized as initiative than a principle but it is empowering our workforce and shifting workplace culture by implementing modern theorys of leadership and management throughout the GNWT.

Something that's really stood out to me working in the North for as many years as I have is that the GNWT is full of passionate subject matter experts and the vast majority of people who work here care about their work, want it to achieve positive outcomes, and have ideas for how that can happen. I think the systems and policies of government can have the tendency to inadvertently get in the way of these ideas or getting in the way of them making their way to the top.

I also know that a common management problem in any organization is that often excelling in a specific role leads a person into management, but they may not have much specific training in managing people. We need to entrench ongoing leadership training and capacity building into the organization to ensure we are developing leaders who know how to build and empower effective teams. Training and capacity building is also a key to increasing Indigenous representation at higher levels in government, something we can't achieve with affirmative action alone.

This concludes my initial contribution to the priority setting process. Despite being quite long, this does not represent a comprehensive

list of all the things I would like to see the government work towards over the next four years. Today I wanted to bring forward the main things I committed to in my platform and which came forward during my campaign, as I said I would. There is still much work to be done. While I maintain that we need to be strategic and focused, I also note that significant amounts of GNWT work proceeds without much political direction and should be considered by MLAs either through the priority setting process or through committee work. I look forward to further honing our priorities in the weeks and months ahead. Thank you

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Kim Wickens): Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. We'll now move to the Member for Great Slave. And following the Member for Great Slave, we'll take a short break.

MS. KATE REID'S SPEECH

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Clerk. Good morning, colleagues. Thank you for our discussions today and in the last week. I am sitting with your words, and I'm letting them live in my heart and mind. I ask that you please do me the favour to hear my words today with an open heart and mind.

We need a territory that puts people at the center of its decisions and policies, a territory where people are valued and respected for who they are now, a territory where people feel like they have a reasonable chance of getting by and where they don't have to worry about being left behind when times get tough. At their doors, I told residents of Great Slave that as their MLA, I will make it my job to help create a community and territory where everyone can thrive. I want to do this by working to advance the following priorities.

My first priority is also an outcome I believe we must prioritize during this Assembly, making sure nobody in the NWT get left behind. We can do this by focusing on the basics that everybody needs - a good place to live, enough money to provide for themselves and their families, and communities that provide more of the goods and services that people rely on locally.

The NWT needs new housing of all types, social, market, and middle housing, to bring down mortgage and rent costs. We also need better programs to look after the housing we already have as well as including climate adaptations for that housing. I'd like to see home heating moved to more renewable NWT industries, namely pellet or wood chip heating, which can also reduce fossil fuel usage.

We need to exhaust every avenue for all types of housing. I'm happy to see recent federal support, but much more needs to be done. The GNWT needs every government, including community and Indigenous, to help secure all federal dollars through every possible initiative. We also need to work with developers, industry, and trades to get both materials and labour here and working on a consistent basis.

Good intentions to work together will not be enough. We need a plan created for and by all partners who have a role in addressing the housing crisis.

To make sure that no one gets left behind, we must begin to address the cost of living. We all know it is skyrocketing and even folks with good jobs are having trouble making ends meet. Working peep deserve a decent standard of living, and people without or between jobs need to be treated with respect and dignity. Government needs to be there for its residents protecting the rights of workers and seriously considering new ways to help people meet their financial needs, like guaranteed basic income projects. The Senate of Canada is studying it, and Alternatives North has already reported on it. It is time that this House takes a serious look at it too.

In my first week of knocking doors, I met two mothers in distress. One was desperately worried about losing her federal housing benefit since reinstated due to lobbying by the PSAC. The other was reviewing carbon tax increases yet to come and saw that she would need to downsize her home to be able to continue to properly provide for her family. These are stories that I want to honour in my time standing before you and are examples of the real financial fears that NWT residents have. I know my colleagues have heard similar stories. GBI is a tool that can lessen our residents' pain of just scraping by barely and would help eliminate the fear that people are feeling. Helping communities provide more of what people need is another way to help NWT residents flourish. Buy local isn't just a slogan; it's a northern way of life.

During the pandemic, we saw how fragile supply chains can be. When we spend locally, we support our neighbours with our dollars as well as our kinship and help to grow local businesses and jobs. We need new and innovative solutions for keeping local dollars local based on input and expertise of NWT businesses, chambers of commerce and mines, non-government organizations, and communities. And we have to make sure that we have the right policies and programs in place to support a better mix of small and

medium size businesses in all NWT communities.

My second priority is a thriving arts and cultural scene. It's not enough to survive. We also need to thrive. Arts help shape the community's identity and creative outlets enhance well-being while also supporting the local economy. Collaborating with artists and artisans on what they identify is needed, like a sustainable core funding and pathfinder services for grants, will help sustain and expand a thriving artistic community. It's also important to note that arts and cultural -- culture is intimately connected to the reinvention of communities.

It is, in fact, a social service. When the artist run community centre operated in an old church slated for demolition in 2011, they became an unofficial downtown day shelter. People of all walks of life were welcomed and felt safe because they were sharing and taking care of an inclusive community space. The ARCC also attracted people to the downtown core, creating economic spinoffs like folks going to restaurants before or after events.

Arts and cultural -- arts and culture have practical socioeconomic returns that are being forgotten, and I will not let them be forgotten for the next four years.

My third priority is that people need to come first in the delivery of government services. Government should spend less time defending ineffective policies and processes and spend more time listening to residents so it can offer programs and services that match the needs that residents say that they have.

What we heard shouldn't mean what we want to hear. People in public engagement should be more than an exercise in checking off a box. It should be a genuine effort to learn from and listen to the public and must incorporate feedback where appropriate. Equally important, they must explain why other feedback was not used.

When I was in the public service, I made it a point to ask how can I help you today? The public service is full of people who genuinely want to do good work, and we need to enable them to do it. This mean takes -- taking a long hard look at how the government functions and where it doesn't and taking steps to remove any barriers that don't support the goal of service. We need to move towards a client service model that enables continued improvement.

My final priority is that we need to have fundamental discussions about how we grow and mature our consensus government. The GNWT has often been criticized for many years for being the party at the table holding up

negotiations. I think we can be clearer at those tables and in all actions if we recognize that our role should be to direct and support a public government that operates alongside Indigenous governments in the spirit of partnership and humility, not opposition. That means high grading the conversation on northern governance.

We need to talk about how we can make collaborative decisions that all residents can trust. For me, that looks like finding a better way forward together. One option could be a bicameral legislature with an Indigenous senate. But I'm one person, and it needs to be a full conversation between all partners.

Further, land back is a conversation we need to be having every day for the next four years. To really confront what that looks like here in the North, what that means with the lens of reconciliation, what that looks like if we are honest about decolonization of a colonial structure that we are upholding as Members of the 20th Assembly. How do we start in that heart and head space to develop trust and earn respect as a partner in governing with Indigenous peoples of this territory?

These are my priorities that I most want to discuss and find a way forward on in the next four years and more if given the chance with all of you. Thank you.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Kim Wickens): Thank you, Member for Great Slave. This actually brings us to 10:30. So we're going to take a short 15-minute break, and we'll reconvene at 10:45. Thank you, Members.

---SHORT RECESS

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Jolene Saturnino): All right, I will call our meeting back to order, Members. Thank you. So we will get resumed for the remainder of the morning, and we will start with the Member from Sahtu and then proceeding that the Member for Boot Lake.

MR. DANNY MCNEELY'S SPEECH

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I firstly want to congratulate all 19 MLAs for putting their name forward in contributing to their efforts on including and delivering their endeavours for the next four years. It's a very prestige obligation to serve this institution and the better interests of the people that put us here as well as the whole Northwest Territories. So given that, I want to thank everybody on putting their name forward and the success in their campaign.

And as we conclude the process for prioritizing our four-year journey, it's very common to hear somebody -- some of the situations that are plaguing in our communities and our urban centres and our territorial economy and so on. In all aspects of what we've heard so far and moving forward and in the process of concluding our priorities, I also look forward to hearing in the coming weeks from our other organizations that they represent residents of the Northwest Territories.

When I did my campaign trail, I seen and heard many concerns, right from housing right to medical travel right to the conditions of the school in Colville Lake.

The school in Colville Lake is a building offering education to the residents of Colville Lake. And it's not very -- it's very concerning to see two classrooms, two individual classrooms, with four classes within each room offered by one teacher. And you have a curtain way for a doorway. That's not what we stand for in delivering education. So I also look forward to recognizing the projects that are out there. The incomplete school in Colville Lake, for example, the incomplete health centre in Tulita. How are we going to deliver health care to the residents of Tulita if we have an incomplete building? These buildings stand for capital projects which could add to the economy, creating a disposable economy for the residents and the workers. So I look forward to putting that as a priority amongst others. The projects listed and are shelved there do not contribute to an economy. So I look forward to expediting that through a priority.

Building relations, we also got to look forward in our coming years to build relations with the federal government and recognizing the many resources that they have through the number of programs. And when I listen to last week's 2023 fall economic statement, I recognized some principles that we can use for the strengthening of our engagements with the federal government. And also recognize the limitations of TFM. We are operating on a core funding that gives us limitations on resources to deliver the fuel subsidy for the program, yet the escalating inflationary factors keep going up, such as carbon tax. And I've heard that a number of times this morning and on the campaign trail. So we also got to look at escalating and increasing our programs and services based on inflation. So I see that as a very important process in strengthening our federal engagement.

And we're plagued by a number of issues that we all heard on our campaign trail, housing being a major one. And the whole impacts of climate change, transitioning to a greener

economy is going to cost money, and the adaptation for climate change is also going to be a factor for escalating rates. And when I see the initiatives before us to help boost our economy, we have a number of critical mineral stakes of claims out there that we can assist with the private sector to help boost our economy.

The Northwest Territories, like many small communities within my riding, are plagued by the socioeconomic challenges, challenges contributing to mental health. We also got to look at mental health, what triggers mental health. Once we identify our priorities, then we can go to the nuts and bolts of defining that in developing an action plan to address mental health, cost of living, housing, and the list is endless.

Higher interest rates is plaguing our projects. In defining our economy, a descriptive statement would say our economy went from roadside assistance to roadside repos. So I think we have got to look at defining how can we reverse that.

There's a number of priorities as mentioned by all of us, and we are -- this 20th Assembly is really in a unique position for developing change, change in a number of priorities and defining those priorities with an action plan to deliver and improve our programs and services.

Education is important to us. We've heard that in our campaign trail. Now, let's look at how to improve the new partnership with the BC government on delivering an academic program that is designed and tailored for the North.

So those are just some of the issues that I look forward in bringing forward on a collective approach during this priority setting process in collaboration with the IGOs in the next coming days, next coming weeks.

Also, the social fabric of our communities is very low for a number of reasons. In my area, similar to other areas, we've got the absence of industry. What replaces industries' injection to the prosperity and to ops for training that come with their presence?

I can recall years ago we had a family that was travelling south on times off, going to get their truck serviced or even exchanged or buying a new one. And that same family is coming back home. I pass them on the winter road. They're full of smiles. The back of their truck is heaped with groceries, and everybody's smiling. I'm going back home to drop my family off and going back to work. That smiling face is not here today. We can go to every small community and every urban community, and

you can see that. So there's many conflicting plugging problems with our communities.

I'm hearing a lot of the influx of drugs and addictions. What's the solution to that? That becomes the aftereffect of designing and hearing and identifying the priorities followed by a review on efficiencies, whether it's a review on efficiencies by department, by department to the programs and services we have, to reflect the redesign process and remedies for those problems that we heard. So I look forward to concluding our priorities, in closing, and hearing from others and collectively over the number of weeks, let's put our list together followed by a review in efficiencies for departments and priorities. Mahsi cho.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Jolene Saturino): Mahsi, Member from Sahtu. I will pass it over to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake followed by the Member for Monfwi.

MR. DENNY RODGERS' SPEECH

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. First and foremost, I'd like to thank the voters of Inuvik for putting their trust in me, Inuvik Boot Lake. It's truly appreciated. My campaign team and the people who worked tirelessly and contributed to my election campaign, again thank you very much. My family for their tireless support. Without them I'd like to -- I certainly wouldn't be here representing Inuvik today.

Thank you to the outgoing Members. The 19th Assembly was plagued with some unprecedented issues that certainly you would not expect - the pandemic, the awful fires, the floods - and I know that wasn't an easy task and certainly, you know, I appreciate their courage and appreciate them putting their names forward to represent their territory. And thank you to the current Members, my 18 other colleagues here for the past week for sharing your thoughts for the open and honest dialogue. It's certainly appreciated. There are obviously are many of the same issue that face us, each region, and it was encouraging to have that dialogue and hear from everyone.

And finally, thank you to the staff of the Assembly, Madam Chair, the team, their patience. I know they're super busy right now, and we certainly appreciate their patience as we onboard and settle into our roles here at the Assembly. So thank you very much.

Campaigning is certainly a humbling experience. It's also a great way to learn and appreciate the many hard working people, the businesses, the Indigenous governments, community governments, and the non-government organizations in our

community. You appreciate what makes our community tick. And going door to door and speaking to people is very humbling and also very educational. I would need likely more than ten minutes to hit every topic and every concern and every priority that was brought to my attention as I did campaign, but I will highlight some. And rest assured, as we move forward with our work, all the issues that were brought to my attention will be brought into this Chamber as well.

When I met with the Indigenous leadership in my region, the governments, it was clear we needed a different approach. We need that whole-of-community approach, and those who followed my campaign will know that I use that term quite frequently as I went door to door and as we debated. We need to ask the Indigenous governments how is the relationship, what's working, and what's not. And I think that's important. How can we as a government ensure that we are working with the Indigenous governments in a way that respects both and ensures we are working shoulder to shoulder providing the most we can for all our residents.

For far too long, divisive politics have made it so that our regions have not been able to take advantage of the opportunities that can come from working together. It's time for us to come together and work for our collective interests. As a whole of community, we are greater than the sum of our parts. We can address the needs of families. We can start to bring economic strength back to our regions. There are many priorities that will require significant work but none of them are possible without first agreeing to listen to each other and to working together. With the collective efforts of the federal government, the Indigenous governments, and the territorial government, we can ensure the prosperity of our regions and the well-being of our residents.

I spoke to many people in my riding that work in the health and wellness sector of our government, and the message was clear. The current model for health care delivery in our region does need some significant improvement. Increasing cost of living in our region have put even more stress on an already overworked and under-resourced system. Frontline staff, public health workers, nurses, administrators, and all the wonderfully talented people who deliver health services in Inuvik know well the stresses our system was under. Medical travel has been an incredible challenge in our region. We must ensure that health professionals living here are given an opportunity to assist and inform our government on how we can improve our health care delivery. By engaging those on the front lines, we can better understand how we work to

make these improvements. That goes throughout each department. It's important that we listen; we listen to the people that are actually delivering our programs. Those are the people that see the issues and can make recommendations on how we as a government can change policy, legislation to ensure that we are being as effective as we possibly can.

I met with educators and education staff during my campaign. To be sure, we have some excellent educators in our community but we must take the action necessary to address the challenge in recruiting and retaining teachers in our region. We need to bring back those who have left our community to pursue education elsewhere so they can work, live, and educate at home. Increasing cost of living in our region have meant that it's become harder and harder for some of our best and brightest in our community. A lack of meaningful access to programs and services for kids has also made it harder to keep people in our community. We must do more to retain the talent we have and to enrich the young talent that is already here. Many young people in our communities thrive when given the opportunity, but in many cases the opportunities are just too few and far between. Access to better programs and services, participation in education reform initiatives are but a few pieces in the largest constellation of initiatives necessary to create a made-in-Inuvik model, built for and by those who call Inuvik home. I am hopeful that with the new leadership, these initiatives can be implemented and begin to allow us to grow the wonderful educators who live and call Inuvik home.

I also spoke to many business owners during my campaign. And, you know, the message was there's no one industry that can solely be relied on. We must work together to ensure major infrastructure projects are procured and completed regionally. And that goes for all regions throughout the Northwest Territories. We must ensure that we have training for our younger workforce to be engaged and given opportunities to succeed at home and not have to leave our territory to find that work. We have to ensure that we keep a focus on the economy and work with our industry and small business partners to ensure we are always thinking strategically and looking for innovative solutions to growing and keeping our economy robust.

One of the biggest and likely the, I guess most talked about when I'm standing in someone's doorway or if I'm in having a coffee with them, Inuvik, like many other communities in the North, is facing a serious addictions crisis. I spoke with residents in their home that were suffering from addiction, literally knocking on

their door and they're telling me, Denny, I need help. It was heartbreaking. We must come together to address this issue.

In speaking with residents, both in the professional field and people in their homes that are being affected by this, the answer's likely in three phase. Certainly we need a treatment centre of some sort, either a treatment or an aftercare centre. We need support for people when they have this treatment, that they come back to the communities. I had a young lady that came to our forum who was struggling with addiction. She comes back to the community. Those wounds have been opened. She's gotten -- she's seeked and gotten the help she's needed. Now she's back in the community, and there's just no support there for her to continue that journey to heal and to be free of this.

You know, the other piece on this is the -- obviously the enforcement. We need to make sure we are working with our enforcement agencies to make sure we are tackling this problem at its root core. We need to ensure they have the tools necessary to do what they need to do. I hear all the time from my residents saying why aren't we doing more? You know, we know where they're getting these drugs. We know where it is in our community, so why aren't we doing more? So we need to look at what we can do as a government to make sure we're giving law enforcement the tools to do that.

The other piece to that is the economy. If people are working, we need to create robust economies. As I said, if people are working they're healthy, they're happy, they're feeding their families, they're putting a roof over their family's heads, they're more likely to make healthy choices and, you know, a better chance of getting free from the addiction.

Our region, as other regions have, in some ways have lost their voice. We haven't had a regional director in our community for four years. This is an integral role in each region. This is the person that reports indirectly to Cabinet, reports indirectly to the Premier's office, and brings the departments together in our region. That position has been sorely missed. I've heard from our Indigenous leadership. I've heard from others in our community. We need to ensure that we're bringing that position back to Inuvik. There's other senior positions as well that I know we have lost over the past four years, and we need to make sure that there is still some autonomy made for the regions so they can make decisions on their own.

Housing obviously was a big issue that was brought up during my door-to-door campaign.

Again, as I heard Members speak earlier, not just social housing, which we know there's a huge need where the Indigenous governments in our region have taken the lead on that, and they've been doing a lot of work through their federal housing initiative funding to get this -- some homes completed, but we need housing for all. We need housing for professionals. We need housing for people that want to move here and make the North their home.

Childcare obviously is always a concern. We need to make sure that we're supporting the people that go to work so others can go to work. We need to make sure that we have childcare that's accessible, and we have -- you know, we have that ability to provide those services in each community. When I was with the Town of Inuvik as mayor, we did a survey and the two questions -- the top two questions were asked for people looking to move to our region was whether or not we had childcare and whether or not we had a pool. So obviously childcare is always on the top of people's minds.

More important than identifying the big issues, though, identifying the solutions to these issues. And the solution to all of those starts with us all working together. When we focus on services and opportunities for children, we must do that as a collective. When we attempt to address significant deficit left to us by the previous government, we must all work together to set clear priorities. When we look to revitalize small businesses in the region, we must look how governments can collaborate. The federal government, the Indigenous governments, and the territorial government have been greater than the sum of our parts. If we can work collaboratively, we could work together. If we can work in true partnership, then we can ensure that each resident finds a voice and that the biggest issues can start to be truly fixed.

During my campaign, I was constantly reminded of the vibrancy, creativity, passion, and intelligence of our communities. My commitment to the people of Inuvik was incredibly high at the start of the campaign and was only elevated in the intervening weeks. I am so proud to call Inuvik home, and I want to generally thank all of you who have invited me into your homes, showed me our passion, put your support in me, and I will do my best to make Inuvik proud as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Jolene Saturino): Mahsi, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. I'll pass the mic over to the Member for Monfwi, followed by the Member for Mackenzie Delta.

**MRS. JANE WEYALLON ARMSTRONG'S
SPEECH**

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, okay, no matter where we go, you know, in the NWT, housing is one of the top priorities on people's mind. Every government makes this a priority and then fails to make any real meaningful changes. We need to start thinking about this differently. I am personally tired of southern consultants and endless policy reviews that don't produce change.

We need to take a different approach to policy making. All government departments seems to want is to create one policy for the entire territory in the name of equality and accountability. Forming this type of policy making will never be fair because it doesn't take into consideration how different our 33 communities are. These differences should be celebrated. Like in small NWT communities, it's not the same as it is in larger communities or larger regional centre. One centralized policy is not the answer to our problem but is the problem. We need to change the way we do business that recognizes each community's unique needs.

For example, life in small communities, it's not the same as larger one. For example, in Wekweeti, after 6 o'clock there's no place to buy a pop. In Yellowknife, there's a lot of other establishment that you can go to. That's just one of the few examples. I have friends in the capitals -- in the capital and for some people who come here from the south, they talk about how much their home is worth, their house is worth, and their retirement plans, etcetera. And that is great for them, and I support them in what they want. The majority of people who live in smaller Indigenous communities don't view housing in the same way. We have been living here since the beginning of time. We don't view it the way that others view their house. Housing for us, especially for me, does not have a financial value but is a place where we raise the next generation of people. I live in my late parent's house and God willing, some day my grandson will raise his family there too as well.

Centralized decision making has never worked in the NWT context. Current policy development practices support colonization and need to be changed to incorporate the Indigenous world view. My late auntie, Elizabeth MacKenzie, often spoke about Chief Jimmy Bruneau words. Strong like two people, (no translation) and (no translation) - our way of life. This means that our policies needs to reflect all NWT culture.

The 20th Legislative Assembly needs to develop its policy using a concept like strong like two people. If we want things to be better across the NWT, we need to have different policies and different ways of doing things in different communities that supports the community.

Madam Chair, medical travel. We all received some concerns from residents about medical travel. It is sad that so many people have bad experience with medical travel. Just recently in my Member's statement, we had an elder who travelled to south seeking care because she could not get the help that she need at Stanton, and she was diagnosed with cancer. Sadly, she passed on in Edmonton. And GNWT would not fly her home to be with her family because she was not on approved medical travel list.

I get concerns on a regular basis about escorts and people being denied escorts. It makes me sad because I have seen what a better system looks like. When I was a GNWT employee, my husband was on sick leave for three years. We travelled to Edmonton at least five times a year. We were given a hotel room, a rental car, food money, and we could easily change our travel plan as needed. We treat GNWT employees far better than our citizens, especially coming from small communities. It seems like medical travel system for citizens is all based around doing things the cheapest way possible. People who travel under this system get stuck in boarding homes, and they have no choice. The GNWT has to find a better way of providing these services in a way that support people.

Mental health and addictions. Many people have told us we need to bring a treatment centre back to the North, and then we heard it here from our colleagues. Every time this gets discussed, the bureaucrats tell us all the reasons why it failed in the past. For me, it's not about if we should. We have to bring treatment back to the NWT. The big question is how are we going to do it.

To simply bring up some southern base treatment facility and drop it in the NWT would not work well. We cannot just rely on the western medical treatment model but incorporate our own culture in order to make this work.

Madam Chair, I myself went to southern treatment, but my road to recovery was much more than just a facility or a 30-day program. That was just the beginning. I had to really work on myself and get support in a lot of different ways. I also had the support of my family, my friends, my elders, and the community. I would like to see some type of treatment facility or wellness centre in every region in the NWT. As

part of it, we also need strong on the land programs that incorporate our language, culture, and way of life, strong supports and aftercare for people that go to treatment. Also opportunities for those on the road to recovery, like stable housing, education, and employment opportunities. Today when people return to their communities after treatment program, there are little supports in place for them. Many are still homeless and have lack of supports. On day one, many relapse.

Infrastructure. This is a big priority for everyone. We need to rethink how we do capital planning. We need to work more closely with community leadership like mayors, municipal governments, Indigenous governments, to make sure we are investing our money in the right places. We also need to focus on things like roads that will reduce the cost of living and support economic opportunities. In my region, we have not seen much investment in infrastructure. Some of our infrastructure, like water pipes, were put in place before GNWT was established. And our school is over 50 years old. Over the last two years, we have begun working on the plans to replace the school that will be coming before the 20th Legislative Assembly for approval. This is not just the only school. There are other schools in small communities with a lot of issues that needs attention as well.

Cost of living. All of us here are concerned about the cost of living. Many residents are struggling to provide the basic. We need to approach this issue in a variety of ways. For example, jobs. Bring good paying jobs to the NWT through strategic investment in infrastructure. Infrastructure, we need to invest in projects that will reduce the cost of living. What we need to do is settle collective agreement. There are other 6,000 GNWT employees that have not received an inflationary wage adjustment for years. Since the GNWT is the largest employer, settling the collective agreement should create a strong stable workforce and provide an economic boost to the NWT.

Tax. We need to revisit the carbon tax. This tax has an impact on smaller communities as we often -- many depend on diesel power for generations -- power generations, and people travel greater distance on winter road using more gas to get goods and services.

Another thing that what we need to do is review government programs, like income support, to ensure they are adjusted accordingly. Thank you.

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Jolene Saturino): Thank you, Member for

Monfwi. Members, I'd like to draw your attention to the gallery and acknowledge former Member of the 19th Assembly and current Minister Mrs. Paulie Chinna. Welcome to the gallery.

Next is Member for Mackenzie Delta, followed by the Member for Yellowknife South.

MR. GEORGE NERYSOO'S SPEECH

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I would like to give thanks to the residents of the Mackenzie Delta for giving me the opportunity to represent them in this 20th Legislative Assembly. It's a great honour to be in this Chamber with my colleagues. And I would also like to acknowledge the outgoing past MLA, Mr. Fred Blake Jr. for his many years of service to the people of Tsiigehtchic, Fort McPherson, and Aklavik.

Today I would like to address some of the concerns/issues that were raised during my campaign for the MLA of the Mackenzie Delta. The residents of my riding are very concerned with the future of their respective communities and their well-being. Although we cannot, as a government, make certainty to all these issues, we can address the need to make our constituents feel that their concerns are being addressed by the appropriate departments.

Some of the important concerns/issues that have been identified by residents in my riding are as follows, but not limited to, first of all, is the Frank Gruben story where he -- this young man has been missing for a number of years and when I went to visit his family, his family stated that they are left in the dark. The department has not made any effort to come to meet with them, to communicate with them in getting some answers into where they're -- where they are within their investigations into the disappearance of Mr. Gruben. I have given my assurance to the family that I would give this concern my utmost attention to the appropriate department and make sure that the -- they get answers. I would also like to thank Mr. Jacobson, former MLA, for bringing this forth during his time as MLA.

Other issues that were brought forth were, of course, the housing issue. In my riding, we have 128 housing units in the community of Fort McPherson alone. And the waiting list is -- it goes as far as three years you can be on the waiting list, and we have some vacant homes within the community. We cannot build 128 homes to meet the needs of some of our -- most of our residents but we can use alternative measures, like building -- using retrofits where we can use energy efficient homes, build energy efficient homes to meet the needs of our constituents. There is many people who are on

the medical list that require housing. We have to find that alternative measures where we can meet the needs of these specific people so that they can get in housing as soon as possible. These are some of the concerns that come within housing.

And treatment centres, I've heard these concern coming to me, the need for treatment centres within the North was much needed because there are people out there who want to -- who want and need the help that they deserve. Sending our Indigenous people south for treatment is not working. We send our people to southern institutions and they're expected to adapt to these -- totally a different culture. And when they come back, there's no aftercare, and they fall right back into the same system.

When I think of treatment centres, I look back at two individuals from my community of Fort McPherson who have passed on since. Mr. Leo Collins and his wife Elizabeth, in 1970s they took it on their own to seek help for themselves, a better lifestyle for themselves and their children. So they went to Henwood I believe, and they seeked -- they got the treatment that they wanted. Then they came back to the community and tried to help their community, other community members. They started up an AA centre, which was used as drop-in centre where they can -- people can come in that feel safe, especially the children of the community. The children of the community gathered there and played games, watch television, and if other members of the community needed some counselling, Mr. Collins and his wife were there to provide the counselling services within the community, a community-based program that was very successful. But funding cuts took that program out of our community and now are left with finding alternative measures to meet these needs.

The education system is one where we, in the communities, small communities, are left to deal with two departments where socially promoting our students is definitely not working. We find that our students are socially promoted to stay in the same age group. Then when they graduate, they're not adequately educated enough to take on post-secondary education, and they have to look at other alternatives. And one alternative is going to the social services for social assistance. Once they get the social assistance, they're stuck there. Their self-esteem is way down. So we have to find measures to build their self-esteem up and reform our education system where our students are educated so that they can be better citizens and be more in the workforce.

Some of these community-based programs that I talked about need to be -- need to come right down to the community level rather than Yellowknife or some of the other centres, like Inuvik and Hay River. It has to come directly to our small communities where we can work with our members, our residents. What works in Yellowknife or Inuvik may not work in places like Tsiigehtchic. Only the residents of Tsiigehtchic knows what needs to be done. We can, they can work with their own people and find solutions and make it more healthier.

I would also like to thank the -- my colleagues here. I look forward to working with you in this 20th Legislative Assembly to meet some of these needs. I would also like to acknowledge the constituents of my riding that I will and seek your advice in meeting some of these priorities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Thank you, Member for Mackenzie Delta. Up next, we have the Member for Yellowknife South, followed by the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

MS. CAROLINE WAWZONEK'S SPEECH

MS. WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, colleagues. I am very honoured to have this opportunity to address you for the first time here today as part of our starting off process to define what we will be as an Assembly together.

Shortly I have three priorities I would like to suggest. But before I do that, I thought it would be important to consider what it is I am trying to achieve with those priorities. If we don't know where we're going, all of our good intentions simply will not get us anywhere. And so I want to just take a moment to consider exactly what is the vision for the Northwest Territories that we hope our priorities will achieve.

Colleagues, by the time my children and your children grow up, I hope the Northwest Territories will be known as a leader, as a trail blazer, and as a place of opportunity. I would hope that we'll be known as leaders in Indigenous reconciliation and known for our style of consensus governance. I want all children of today to have opportunities available to them across all of the Northwest Territories because we have unlocked the tremendous potential that exists in all of our regions for a diverse and prosperous economy. And with this prosperity will come opportunities for residents to be healthy, educated, and ready to maximize their opportunities.

I believe we can achieve this vision of health and prosperity because of the potential that

exists in all of our regions. A few examples are climate and permafrost science is world class; sustainable resource development opportunities - gold, diamonds and critical minerals and metals across many regions; rural and remote clean energy systems have an opportunity to innovate; the satellite arrays; forms of art and cultural expression; our unmatched freshwater fishery industries; adventure and authentic tourism; LNG reserves across the Beaufort Delta; Indigenous-led conservation opportunities; innovative agriculture initiatives; a place where the world could come to deliver on remediation projects, and so much more. This is not an exhaustive list. I know I have probably missed something important to some of you. That's not my point. My goal is simply this: I want us to all take stock of the opportunities across the entire Northwest Territories so that we all start to believe in the potential for the Northwest Territories in the future.

The diamond mines may be closing but that is not our narrative. We must be looking to the future.

And so with that, the three priorities that I'd like to suggest are the following: First is governance, that our governance be grounded in treaties, consensus, and responsiveness through all of our systems and services. Second, people, that the people of the Northwest Territories are healthy and have a strong sense of well-being. And third, prosperity, that we create the foundations needed to maximize a potential for economic prosperity that exists across all of our regions. And there are many actions that we can take within those priorities to help us achieve these goals. I will go through a few examples under each heading. And to be clear, these examples are not everything I heard during the campaign month. There was a long list of individual issues and concerns raised, many of which I believe we can continue to work on as part of the work of government. But what I'm looking to do now is create a framework within which we can set those goals and objectives for a future that is better for everyone. I'll start first with governance.

Governance, again, that is founded on treaties, consensus, and responsiveness. Settling land claims comes up year over year at Assembly after Assembly. I'm conscious of that, but it is time that we move this forward. If we look at this as a priority and look at some of the foundational work that's been done, such as the UNDRIP Implementation Act, and the legislative protocols within IGCS, we are well placed to make progress.

I'd like to see the finalization of the Indigenous procurement policy. This would be a perfect example of how better governance, and better governance that's founded on consensus and engagement, can move this discussion forward.

We should be finishing the work to a renewed framework for the human resources in the public service. We need better leadership training for all of our staff. We need to have an empowered and engaged public service. And our Affirmative Action Policy needs to be brought into the 2000s. We should be focusing on ensuring that we are, in fact, providing a representative public service for those that we serve across the Northwest Territories.

And finally, a relationship with municipalities too. Are we truly responsive to the communities, to all 33 communities? I believe that our consensus system presents us with an opportunity that is perhaps unique and distinct to work strategically with municipalities, each and every one of them, for the betterment of the whole territory.

Last, I will add integrated service delivery. This, in fact, is a hallmark of government services being responsive, the idea that we can be responsive to the needs of those that we serve.

Under my second priority, that of people of the Northwest Territories being healthy and having a strong sense of well-being, I have two examples I want to give here. And the first of which is one of the biggest concerns that was raised with me, and that is of the health care system, that we need a health care system that is itself healthy and sustainable.

What we have been doing simply is not working, and we must resolve it. The health and the health care system will always be a key focus of government service delivery, but perhaps by prioritizing health itself as the goal, we can better hold that system to account for what it delivers and ask what can be done to focus on healthier people, healthier communities, prevention, and public health. This may mean not chasing down every new federal program that is presented to us. Perhaps it means that we need to be reexamining what our actual goals are.

Second, is housing. Housing is a very clear example of a mechanism by which we can achieve the goal of residents who have greater health and well-being. Available and affordable housing across the entire spectrum of housing needs from homelessness to market housing is a challenge faced across Canada, and we need to tackle it in a way that is respectful and responsive to the communities of the Northwest

Territories. A housing forum established at the Council of Leaders is an opportunity to help monitor the development of community housing plans and ensure that all dollars that are coming in are in fact effectively being distributed and employed in a way that is culturally sound. We want to ensure that elders can age in place and that is person with a disability is properly accommodated. We need to be speaking at the ground level so that every dollar counts.

And last, my third priority I'd like to speak to and give some examples of is the idea of prosperity through the development of our potential. Here, what kind of changes or actions are needed so that all regions can better develop their potential prosperity? I believe there are many common barriers that exist across the Northwest Territories. If we can tackle these barriers, I believe we can help spur development and opportunities for growth and increased productivity. I have four examples, which I may or may not get to in the next three minutes, but I'm going to try.

First, high costs are a significant barrier to development and growth in the North. We need to overcome these high costs. And two key drivers are energy and transportation and the lack of energy and transportation corridors. And so those are my first two examples. We must pursue a pathway off diesel and modernize our energy infrastructure across the Northwest Territories and in communities. We need to be ready to adapt to new technologies and intermittent renewable. There are many actions that can propel us here, whether it's Taltson, community-based projects, an increase of various renewables and hydro systems, but we also cannot ignore the new coming technologies of micronuclear better battery storage systems. We need to be ready to be adaptable.

Transportation as well, the Northwest Territories continues to have many communities who are relying on road systems that are disconnected or only by winter road, the season for which is obviously becoming increasingly unpredictable. With a geography so vast, which could be our opportunity, instead our lack of transportation network becomes a barrier. We must face this challenge and resolve it. The Mackenzie Valley

Highway is one obvious opportunity already underway that we must see to completion but at the same time can we work with Indigenous governments on their own settled lands to help support them to increase their community connectivity. The Tlicho All-Season Road won a national award for innovative partnerships. Let's repeat that success.

Third, labour. There is another challenge for labour force across all sectors. There's much we can do to help our education system prepare our students and, as well, at the same time ensuring that those who are able to ready to work have affordable and available childcare so that they can go to work. I'd like to see the completion of the Aurora College. This has been another example of an opportunity where we can take charge of our own future and seek opportunities across the entire territory with all campuses. And here again I put housing. Perspective employees, of course, need somewhere to live.

My last example under this third of my priorities is our regulatory processes. We need to be ensuring that all government entities responsible for regulations, registries, and permitting have the adequate staff who are well trained and have ongoing professional development opportunities. I'd like to see published targets for all of them for all of their processes and make sure that they are properly incentivized to meet them. Let's seek a pathway towards a one-business one-application system, such as in the tourism licensing field.

In conclusion, those are my three priorities that I am proposing with many opportunities to create goals and actions underneath them.

Colleagues, I'm looking very much forward to working with all of you. I want this Assembly to pull in some common directions. That is not the same as saying that every program, every service, and every delivery will be the same but it is an opportunity to have clear priorities, to find common ground, and to refocus on that common ground when we might come to a point of disagreement. And with that, I hope that we can all collectively achieve better health, better well-being, and more prosperity for the residents of the Northwest Territories. Thank you

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Rutland): Thank you, Member for Yellowknife South. Next, we'll hear from the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, followed by the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. LESA SEMMLER'S SPEECH

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First, I would like to acknowledge and thank the constituents of Inuvik Twin Lakes for their ongoing support, and I'm very honoured to be here to represent you all for a second term. I'd like to thank my family, the elders that supported me through my campaign, that gave me good words and strength when I needed it, my team that was always there for me throughout the campaign.

And congratulations to all of my colleagues, and I look forward to working with you all over the next four years as we work for the people of the Northwest Territories.

During my election campaign in Inuvik, the voices of my community highlighted pressing issues that demand immediate attention, so I won't be focusing on what my three priorities are or what a small short list of is. I want to bring the voices of what my community has told me, and the reason for that is is that way we all get a picture of where everyone's coming from and then when we do get in that room and we do start to finalize our priorities, that we all know where we all are coming from.

In Inuvik, like many other communities, our community has been hit hard by drugs. We need to work together with the RCMP. We need them to have the tools that they need to be able to combat this issue. Our people are suffering. Our people are dying from this. This is not something that we can continue to talk about or do any reports or anything. We need to deal with this in many of our communities, and it's not just in the regional centres. It's in our small communities.

The need for a dedicated treatment centre for individuals struggling with alcohol and drugs addictions was a recurrent concern for many of my constituents -- or many of the members in Inuvik Twin Lakes. There is a strong community recognition of the importance of providing support and resources to address substance abuse issues. Constituents expressed a strong desire for aftercare programs, emphasizing the significance of sustained support beyond initial treatment. This also reflects a traditional -- that also reflects a traditional approach to wellness and recovery. Acknowledging that ongoing assistance is crucial for individuals rebuilding their lives after overcoming addiction, and many of the residents raised and expressed that we must work towards a regional residential treatment facility within our -- within all our regions because we are all so different. And we must be working with our Indigenous partners to achieve this.

The escalating cost of living emerged as a shared priority along most of our -- most of the doors that I went to, particularly amongst seniors and those on fixed incomes and single income homes. Those are usually our single mothers. And on occasion, I went to a couple doors that had a single -- couple single fathers so they expressed this as well.

When they have to choose between heating their homes, keeping the power on, and sacrificing the amount of food that they can buy at the end of a month, this is not acceptable

when you live in the Northwest Territories. We should be able to pay our bills when we go to work, go home, feed our families, and then maybe even have a little extra dollars to provide some sense of happiness. If we don't have that, then what are we doing?

Some of the people said that they can't afford to stay in the Northwest Territories because there's no other option for them. They can't remain in their homes. They can't pay their bills. And where are they going to go? There's no other housing options for them. And they look to the south because that's where the options are. The strain on household budgets call for strategic interventions by our government to help find creative solutions to the financial burdens our people face and to ensure that essential needs remain within reach of all our residents.

Childcare availability is vital for our families. If people don't have childcare, then they can't work. So we as legislators need to work with organizations and people who provide this service to ensure that we are supporting them. We need to make sure that our universal childcare agreements are accurately getting what is needed for the Northwest Territories for our daycares, our day homes, so that they can be successful in providing this service to our residents.

Dental care has emerged as a focal point. If you live in Yellowknife, as it's the only place right now with a dentist at this time, you wouldn't understand how not having access to dental care year after year impacts people's health. Constituents expressing the need for more options and accessibility, strengthening the dental service is important to the overall well-being of our community, and its efforts should be made to expand these services to meet the diverse needs of our residents.

Changes were made in the last government to the legislation. Now it's time for this government to ensure those regulations are complete. This will help alleviate some of these concerns by allowing more services in small and remote communities. Many of our Indigenous populations are covered by non-insured health benefits. And with this, it includes dental services. GNWT needs to be working with NIHB on streamlining access to dentists for our residents. There needs to be a clear -- there needs to be clear public information for people to know how to access these services. There needs to be training for our frontline staff. And we heard about locum staff. Well, we can't train every locum staff on what we provide, what we can and what all of the people of Northwest Territories have access to, so people get turned away when they go to access services because

our locum staff do not know that the service is available. So training is very important.

Medical travel was also identified as an area needing urgent improvement. When people are aware, any one of us in this room has ever had medical travel, we know when our next appointment is if we have ongoing appointments. We know when the doctor has told us to follow up and return to an appointment. We pass that on to medical travel. Well, once it gets to medical travel, you know, this could be months, weeks, days before their need to travel. They should not be missing appointments because of a delay in approval to book their travel. And then when they do get the late approval, in our region good luck if you can get a seat on the plane. This is unacceptable. We shouldn't be missing appointments because we're waiting for somebody somewhere else to approve this.

People said to me that the necessity of streamlining the process to ensure they have easy access to medical travel and health care service is another important issue. Addressing these challenges will contribute to the overall health and well-being of our community members. People utilizing medical travel are already going through stressful situations. We should not be adding to their stress. We should be ensuring that there are service standards that can ease this process.

The lack of affordable housing has emerged as a critical issue. With new housing costs out of reach for many young families, they don't even dream of owning their own homes, because it's a dream. It's not a reality as they couldn't even afford a down payment. The rental market with very limited vacancies and high costs many people cannot afford. Even if they could find a place, they can't afford it. Inuvik housing authority has a long waitlist. And this goes through every single community in the Northwest Territories. There is a waitlist. There is no community that I can't say that doesn't have a waitlist. Many people -- this is causing many families overcrowding, moving into parents' homes, moving into cousins' homes or being homeless. We've heard of people in the community in the last -- Member from Nunakput from the last time had families living in tents in the Northwest Territories with newborn children. This is unacceptable. Tackling this housing crisis requires collaborative efforts to explore innovative solutions making housing more accessible and affordable for residents across different income brackets.

The availability of land in Inuvik was raised to me by the Town of Inuvik. The town would like to see the lands owned by the GNWT within municipal boundaries transferred to them. They

can develop those plans with the Indigenous governments within our municipality. That's where we work together collaboratively, so that these lands could be utilized for public sectors to build much needed housing that we need in our communities. This is not just in my community, and I think this in every community. If we are truly working with our Indigenous partners, we can do this. There's also a strong call to continue the efforts to build the Mackenzie Valley Highway to help reduce the cost of living and open up new economic [audio interruption] and the bask cager. My children were able to do this. Our children can't do this anymore because the cost to fly is astronomical. And this is putting an impact on our youth who come from low -- and more so from those youth that come from low income families. Having healthy options in all our communities, when it comes to sports and recreation, is a must. We need to be looking and expanding opportunities for our youth and teams over this term.

I will go on. I could go on. I'll talk. I'll highlight regional decision-making is very important, but I just want to stress that the voices of Inuvik want action on multiple fronts. And I know all these are issues that we collectively have as a territory. We have lots of work to do. I am only one MLA, and I want to work with all of you to try to make a better Northwest Territories for our residents. Thank you.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Rutland): Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. The Member for Yellowknife North, and then the Member for Nunakput.

MS. SHAUNA MORGAN'S SPEECH

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am grateful for the colleagues around me and all of our ideas and contributions. I'm grateful to live in this place and in such a home of the Dene and Metis peoples and to be able to call it my home too. I've had the privilege of doing work in all regions of the NWT. I understand that our territory is a collection of many worlds, many realities, but I truly believe that we are all connected and when the smallest community or the most vulnerable amongst us suffers, we all suffer. Those of us in Yellowknife must find common cause with other communities while empowering each community to find its own unique ways to address our common problems.

I spoke with many constituents who have become so discouraged in recent years, who are struggling to believe that change is possible in government. But through our conversations, we're persuaded to find some hope. It sounds contradictory, but I am both buoyed up by that hope and feel the weight of it because over the

next four years, people need to see real improvements in their lives and in how the government operates if our residents are to believe in this community and to invest all they have to offer here.

I'm going to present each of my four priorities as outcomes, not as categories like housing or economy or health that could easily be slotted under just one department. My vision is that each priority will require a whole-of-government approach, meaning that all Cabinet Ministers and all GNWT senior leadership will become equally accountable for achieving each one of them.

My first priority relates to how the GNWT operates in our workplace environments. First, I want to share stories I heard on the campaign trail from various GNWT employees. See if you can hear some of the common themes as I've been trying to do. I talked to doctors frustrated that they spend the bulk of their time doing administrative tasks or work better suited to another health care professional instead of seeing the many residents who cannot get a family doctor assigned to them. I heard of many nurses and doctors quitting their positions, some who have practiced here for a long time, to work as locums or in administrative jobs because they are so frustrated with the inflexibility of the bureaucrats who manage their time. I heard disappointment from employees who saw extremely qualified northern Indigenous candidates turned away from job opportunities due to narrow requirements for educational qualifications or a requirement for the position to be based in Yellowknife. I talked to an employee in the education department who's not allowed to talk to anyone at the schools and cannot even answer an email without waiting weeks for approval from up the chain of command. I talked to employees who are passionate about reducing our dependence on fossil fuels but spend their days fighting with colleagues in departments of ECC and Infrastructure and ITI over who is actually in charge of this, while struggling to even get a meeting with anyone over at the power corporation. I talked to RCMP officers who are frustrated about being asked to use policing tools to deal with problems that are essentially about under-housing and poverty. They've been asking the GNWT for years to set up joint street outreach teams that include social workers or outreach nurses and mental health counsellors, but to no avail. I've heard from folks working to integrate supports for the under-housed population but are dismayed that integration often means lower level staff sit in meetings all day with dozens of interdepartmental committees while deputy

ministers continue to point fingers at each other instead of making recommended changes.

The reality is that we will not accomplish any ambitious priority that we set out for ourselves in this Assembly until we get our house in order, which leads me to my first priority outcome which is ensure the time and energy of the GNWT workforce is well spent by fully utilizing their expertise, roles, and creativity. Our government is made up of many competent, dedicated, and knowledgeable individuals who find themselves embedded in a system that often demands that they paint by number, a system that is fixated on the risks of fresh ideas while ignoring the risks posed by the status quo.

As the previous examples illustrate, there are real and costly consequences to wasting people's time and having extremely low morale in the workplace. We are used to auditing the monetary side of our government's output, ensuring money is spent responsibly, but I think it should be equally important to audit whether people's time is well spent and whether their talents are being efficiently mobilized. And a key aspect of this will be ensuring more productive relationships between decision-makers and staff, starting right from the top with us. There needs to be the trust and the freedom for leaders and staff to respectfully challenge each other so that information and ideas can flow more freely, and we could find the creative and flexible solutions necessary to get us through the hard times ahead.

This shift in management culture will take courage and leaders willing to take risks to withstand criticism, to admit mistakes, and to learn from them. I believe that healthier internal relationships will lead to healthier external relationships, such as with Indigenous governments and with municipalities. And so while this priority should cut across all departments, I would suggest we focus immediately on human resource management in the health care system as it is not only a matter of life and death but also one of our most costly areas to manage.

My second priority outcome is increase the supply of decent affordable housing in every region, setting targeted increases for market housing, public housing, and supportive living facilities with built-in case management and harm reduction programs.

So many of you are well aware that affordable housing is fundamental. We can't grow our workforce until new staff can find homes. The shortage is crippling local small businesses and preventing us from hiring teachers and health care workers amongst others. We cannot get people off the street or move people who are

currently in supportive living facilities into independent housing until there is something for them to go. And with nonexistent vacancy rates, we have no hope of seeing rent prices go down. With overcrowding, we see more family violence, more children in care, and poorer health. It's a downward spiral in urgent need of a course correction.

So I think we cannot afford to spend any more time discussing whether this needs to be done. The question is how are you going to chip in and participate. Every department should see a role for themselves, whether it's making links between housing provision and teacher recruitment or links with services such as aftercare from addictions treatment or changing policies such as income assistance that are part of the problem.

We do need better care for those struggling with addictions, and I would argue that addictions care should be closely linked with supportive housing facilities that include case management and harm reduction practices, both before and after formal addictions treatment programs. Examples of groundbreaking programs that we can build upon are the K'asho Go'ine Housing Society's men's group home in Fort Good Hope and the YK Women's Society Spruce Bough facility here in Yellowknife.

My third priority outcome concerns energy, electricity, and the climate crisis. We need to ensure our public utility is governed by industry best practices and aligned with a broader territory-wide plan to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Some of the top concerns I heard from constituents were around high electricity prices, increased reliance on backup diesel generators, aging hydro infrastructure, and the overall absence of vision by the power corporation on how we are to cope with a rapidly changing climate and a world that is abandoning fossil fuel based technologies.

A myth has been perpetuated that the North is so different that no viable renewable alternatives exist, yet our citizens and industry are finding cost effective ways of reducing their carbon footprint. When it comes to climate change, the residents of the NWT want a seat at national and international tables. They want to be part of the solution, and they want a public utility that is forward thinking, efficient, manages its assets well, and invests wisely in proven renewable technologies.

My fourth and final priority outcome is build a healthy resilient northern workforce with the confidence and built-in supports to continually learn new skills and adapt to changing economic opportunities.

First I want to speak about the economy. I fully appreciate the deep fears many have shared with me about a downward economic spiral as the diamond mines begin to shut down. But I want to point out that our economy is already weak because it is full of massive leaks. Currently only 37 percent of the diamond mine workforce actually lives in the NWT. An even smaller fraction of the Giant Mine remediation workforce is northern. Almost all of the workers in our construction industry are temporary workers from the south. Even the local company that services my furnace brought a guy all the way from Newfoundland this month to fix it. So despite our leaky ship, I know some are advocating for spending our limited public funds on infrastructure that we hope could lead to more mineral exploration that we hope could turn into big new mines. Now, that's a lot of hoping and a lot of risk. We may indeed need more mines to create enough jobs but international commodity prices present uncertainties far outside our control. So here's my fear, that if we venture out into those risky and volatile waters with a leaky boat, we will sink. If we invest in industry infrastructure instead of investing in our people, then even if all the stars aligned new mines could employ relatively few Northerners and mine benefits would flow south. So the first step in our economic strategy must be to plug the leaks and invest in our people.

In this modern world where a workforce for an industry such as mining can be flown in and out from literally anywhere in the world, we need to create an economy that plays to our strengths, that produces things rooted in this land and in our peoples and cultures. It must be built on a strong education system infused with community connections and mentorships, taking place on the land wherever possible, meaningfully integrating local languages with health care services, both mental health care and physical health care, that are available in all educational facilities. It must be focused on building up a sense of confidence, identity, and passion for lifelong learning. And as we integrate immigrants and newcomers who come to fill the vacant positions, we need to also embrace them with our tight-knit communities to give them powerful reasons to stay here.

So there's a chance this Assembly could be faced with more emergencies, a new plague, new natural disasters, but this doesn't mean that our priorities will become irrelevant. In times of emergency, our weaknesses become magnified and the foundational priorities that I've outlined become all that much more important.

So in conclusion, I propose that we get our own house in order first, unleash the productivity and creativity of our GNWT workforce, focus on housing and energy system foundations, and plug the leaks in our economic boat by building up a healthy confident skilled workforce that is rooted in this land and these communities. Thank you. Mahsi. Quyananni. Merci.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Rutland): Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Now we will hear from the Member for Nunakput, followed by the Member for Deh Cho.

MRS. LUCY KUPTANA'S SPEECH

MRS. KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to first start by congratulating everybody, the newly elected MLAs. We have some hard work ahead over the next four years. And I'm so inspired and hopeful by the many words and ideas shared by my colleagues.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about Nunakput, the traditional lands of the Inuvialuit, which comprises the communities of Sachs Harbour, Ulukhaktok, Paulatuk, and Tuktoyaktuk. My comments are going to be short and direct.

Living and travelling and visiting throughout the Nunakput riding, you see and hear of many challenges of a mainly Indigenous population that wants a good standard of living like every other citizen in this great country of Canada.

What is my expectation and what do the Nunakput constituents expect? I have many bullets.

Many more homes built with quality standards made to exist in the Arctic, proper doorways and porches and hardware, not the cheapest. I met a constituent who told me that she owed housing over \$100,000 in rent for a unit built in the early '70s. She had been homeless for eight years and couch surfing at her daughter's home for those many years. How can you be homeless in the Arctic? People want a safe existence in their home and in their community. Our policing services, our bylaw services, our ambulatory services, which are nonexistent in many communities. Drug and alcohol is plaguing our communities. We want a thriving school full of staff and students and all the resources required to fulfill their educational growth, like gymnasiums. Tuktoyaktuk hasn't had a gymnasium for over three years. The attendance rate right now is 43 percent. A health system with nurses ready to help in community in crisis and prevention. Constituents need help with mental health issues and addictions. They need day-to-day counselling services and many time clinical

counselling. I find we are all still feeling the effects of the lockdown and with the minimal interaction, especially with our young people. Our medical travel and dental care is in terrible disarray. Patients are missing critical appointments due to travel with incomplete paperwork. It's a total disrespectful society system. The opportunity to live in an affordable environment, groceries, gas, and fuel are through the roof and people are barely surviving. They're barely surviving. The opportunity to make a living, to harvest for their family, to use their traditional skill set, whether it be harvesting, sewing, beading, or creating, or trapping.

While my riding Nunakput, waves the flag and says Canada, I'm still here, existing and thriving in an extreme environment, protecting Canada's sovereignty many times, it's last on the list. I'm here today to say I did not promise anything but to work hard, to be present, and to shine a light on the neglect of this most critical riding. Without this riding, you'd have no ocean, no Northwest Passage, no Arctic islands, and no Inuvialuit. A beautiful bountiful land of people who are humble, strong, and still very much traditional. So when I bring issues to the table, think of living an hour and a half away by plane from Inuvik. Sometimes waiting days for a medivac plane because of weather, where our marine transportation system cannot get into your community to drop off its annual supply due to sea ice, where elders are sent 700 kilometres away from their family to live in long-term care, you where you have to limit your water usage if you are in public housing. Where is the equality?

This dream of truth and reconciliation is many times a distant thought. I know and recognize that the next four years will be some tough choices, but remember that there is many in the territory that are living in poverty, with violence in the home, struggling with mental health and addictions, or lack of capacity or education to move ahead. So let's support those that are less fortunate and support those that can help themselves but need a little more assistance like our harvesters. That is what government is supposed to do.

Thank you to my family, the constituents of Nunakput, who elected me and all the support over the past campaign period. This concludes my short remarks. Quyananni.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Rutland): Thank you, Member for Nunakput. We will now hear from the Member for Deh Cho, followed by the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MRS. SHERYL YAKELEYA'S SPEECH

MRS. YAKELEYA: Good morning Members of the Legislative Assembly and all the staff. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to congratulate all Members on their campaign to be here, and I look forward to working with each one of you as we work for all NWT residents. I am honoured and humbled in being here today. I want to say mahsi cho to my team, my official agent, and all who supported my campaign. I also want to thank the Deh Cho constituents for their belief in me to be their voice in this Assembly. I want to thank my husband Norman and my children for their support, my family and friends. I could not do this without them by my side.

Today I want to talk about what I heard in my campaign going door to door in my riding of the Deh Cho. I want to thank the constituents and elders for taking the time to meet with me and discuss the issues that are of concern to them. During my campaign, I heard many concerns and I know I won't be able to mention every one of them. But here is a highlight of some of what concerns the residents of the Deh Cho talked about.

To begin with, we all know about the forest fires that occurred this summer and the impacts that occurred in in the communities of K'atloodeeche and Enterprise. The devastation that occurred there and how the residents are trying to pick up their lives and continue was at the forefront of these discussions. Some of these residents do not have insurance to rebuild. They all want to return to their homes. How can we assist with this?

The residencies of Enterprise are concerned that their local workforce is not being utilized now with the cleanup of their communities, the residents who need this income to keep food on the table and pay their bills. Why aren't we supporting their efforts to rebuild by contracting them directly?

Another community impacted by the forest fires was Kakisa, Kakisa Lake. Many may not be aware that during the peak of the forest fires in the Deh Cho region, the community of Kakisa was evacuated however they did not know about it. Their evacuation was to occur at a time when communication systems went down and when they did not know they were in danger. There was no phone call or anything to advise them of the dangers. This has shown us that we need another communication system in the NWT as there are so many communities without any phone access in the midst of a forest fire crisis. We need to ensure this does not happen again.

Later I'll be supporting an independent review of the fires in K'atloodeeche and Hay River -- Enterprise. Sorry, Enterprise. Fort

Providence was thankfully not negatively impacted by the forest fires. They stepped up to help the evacuees who stayed in their community during this time.

The residents of Fort Providence would like to see more amenities in their community. The community of Fort Providence is situated on one of the main highways in the NWT and is without an ambulance service or trained medics. There is no trained medics to help deal with medical crisis in Fort Providence or on the highway if required. The people want a larger recreation centre where more activities can take place to keep the residents and youth busy. They would also like to see a cultural centre, a place where -- a place that can foster a connection to their culture, land, and family.

We know what we experienced in this past summer and are currently experiencing is a result of climate change, forest fires, drought conditions, low water levels. We need to change the way we do things going forward. We can't use the old ways to address these things when we are dealing with different conditions.

Housing was another issue that everyone was talking about. I believe we all heard about the housing shortages in our communities, regions, and the NWT as a whole. Not only are families unable to find a home to live in but our young single adults, how are we going to keep our constituents in our communities if they have no place to live? There are also concerns from people who are in the housing units. They are expected to live in the homes where repairs are not done. One example is an elder, has to put plastic on his window for the last two years so the window stays in. There's no sight of repairs in the near future for this elder.

Health is another huge topic of concern in the Deh Cho. Medical travel has so many issues. There appears to be a breakdown in communication between Yellowknife and the communities. Often patients find out about appointments at the last minute which impacts their ability to travel. There's also concern about having to share your room with a stranger when in the medical boarding residence or hotel. This is unacceptable. I know if I was not feeling well, I would not want to have to share a room with a total stranger. I don't think you would either.

We are not seeing consistent medical care in the communities. Kakisa Lake is a community that does not have any medical services. They have to go to Hay River or Fort Providence to seek care. In addition to this, they continue to fall through the cracks because they don't have a health centre in their community. They often don't get the followup care they require. Need for more -- and there's a need for more health

promotion and prevention resources. No health promotion on diseases like the outbreak of STDs in our communities and the need for educational resources. Mental health and addictions program and the need for aftercare, once people return from treatment centre, is required.

The need for a long-term care facility in Fort Providence. Older residents don't want to leave the community. They want to age at home. Need more training and support for community wellness workers to be able to develop and quality wellness initiatives in the communities, which we are hoping would relieve the strain often put on our community nurses who are often overworked. The increase of drug use has gone up. We need to address these issues.

Education is a concern of the Deh Cho residents. We are not seeing the graduates we used to see. We are not seeing the youth continue their schooling. There's a lot of concern that there's a lack of motivation for youth to remain in school. How can we address these issues?

Residents want to see a cultural orientation on the land for all new and returning teachers as well. There is a need for more training for trades in the communities. We need to consider how we can train local people to gain the skills that are required in our communities. We need to have skilled carpenters to build the houses we so desperately need.

The Indigenous and territorial government need to work together. There is a need to improve the collaborative relationship. The Deh Cho residents want to see the Deh Cho process move forward. We need to have this collaborative relationship be committed to have meaningful discussions to see movement. We have been promised movement for the last two governments without success. The Deh Cho residents want to see relationships that will foster good governance and create economic prosperity for all.

In conclusion, I also want to send my sincere condolences to Monique Sabourin and family on the loss of their youngest son Lawrence. There are so many who are dealing with grief and loss at this time, and my thoughts are prayers are also with them.

In conclusion, in order for us to realize the potential of the NWT we all need to work together. Mahsi.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Now the Member for Yellowknife Centre, followed by the Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. ROBERT HAWKINS' SPEECH

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Members and friends, this is the first opportunity to speak to you as MLA. I want to begin by saying thank you to the residents of Yellowknife Centre for your kind trust as well as bringing me back from my long sabbatical. And a special thanks to my wife, Susan, with whom none of this would actually be possible. She is truly the partner in my full sense of that word.

Now may I remind all my colleagues through this occasion that our spouses, that our children, and our family members, even though they were not on the ballot with us, they always are with us and they will equally share in the results, be it good, be it bad, be it less good, but please remind them that they are important through all this process because without them, we wouldn't be as strong as we are today.

Now, friends, to the business at hand. I've come here today not only to address you as my colleagues of this Assembly but to speak frankly and directly to Northerners at large, all of whom who have sent us here to do their work for them. I know that for many Northerners watching us right now, many the issues that loom over them loom over us. But we are here to carry their hopes and dreams. For many of us the state of the economy is a real concern. We've heard it here today. And it may rise above many other issues for some. However, others there are simple overwhelming issues such as the overwhelming cost of living. Whether you live far in the North or you live in the south NWT, families are making day-to-day decisions that are challenging, and they're struggling. Now not to mention there are many other issues, such as families struggle with the poor application of the \$10 a day health care program, a program well intended but not promised with the delivery and the implementation as we all believed it was. It carries many complications. There are also many other issues before us, and we could go on at length.

Many families are personally worried about the future, as I am as well. But we need to take thoughtful collective steps together to help address many of their concerns. Now more than ever, it is important this Assembly learns to be innovative, progressive, and maybe even sometimes have a little luck. We are here to take steps in the coming months and years to help bring and create a stronger North and a future for all our people in all our ridings. While our economy may have its challenges, I am confident the northern resilience will never be shaken, and we will truly be stronger than ever during our time, this 20th Assembly, our time of renewal.

Now, wishing doesn't necessarily make it so. So there is a lot of work. So let's not underestimate the tough days ahead of us, and there will be. There will be complicated choices in front of every single one of us. Before we know it, we'll be asking difficult questions, but we must not waiver because Northerners are truly depending on us.

If we're truly honest with ourselves, many of us ran for leadership because we felt we didn't see it before, or we felt we had something to offer with respect to the challenges of the day. The reality is we are now here, and we must forge a path forward together not forgetting about people or other ridings, not just about ourselves. So some of us may be new. And I see many of them in here, while there's others of us who are renewed the way I'm looking at it, all with a common goal to help and serve others. I'm confident that we could do this with courage and efficiency, but we must do this in a meaningful way. We must forge ahead clearly not by blaming the 19th Assembly or any other previous Assembly but rather forge tirelessly as we seize the opportunity before us.

It's true at the same time that we often need to remind ourselves the challenges, and maybe even the predicaments of today, we need those to inspire us to work harder for each other and, again, for each other's ridings. We are in this together. The common good will not be solved easily. And for those that think it is, obviously don't understand the grips and the size of our challenges. There will be a lot of work. Some of these challenges will take many years. And let's not fool ourselves because many of these situations we find ourselves in today just didn't happen overnight.

When talking to Northerners, they realize we have a big job in front of us but they also have our confidence and however meaningful as that may be, they expect us to take steps, whether the steps to address the cost of living, help them with the carbon tax challenge on home heating fuel by removing it, we must do what we can.

During my many conversations, I would hear desperate families talk about things that are breaking down. We cannot ignore their calls for help. When I met with several different families, they told me about their struggles. For example, finding a doctor, how can that be in this day and age? One family mentioned to me about the challenge when they were trying to get their diabetes medication with the locum doctor. Every time they had to start over and over and over again with a new doctor. It was getting exhausting. Then there's other families who want to start a family. They want the kindness and continuum of care working with their doctor.

And then you'll hear heartbreaking stories of seniors who are on the other side, entering the next phase of their life, without that trusted special one working with them as they move towards the winter of their life. They want that relationship. And by golly, they deserve it.

When I heard about the ongoing health care challenges, I listened to many of the people talking. It's not just about the locum doctors. It's not just about the locum nurses. It's also about the overworked health care system. They are exhausted. But clearly and importantly, they need to know we have their back because some of these solutions that they need, we just need to listen to. They're not as complicated as we're trying to make them out to be.

At the same time, you don't have to look any further for the evidence of different struggles throughout all our communities. I can point in my community of the homelessness and the addictions of downtown and even the compounding public safety issues that need urgent help. This is not news here, and this is clearly not news in many of the ridings. Many loved ones will tell me they see their family members downtown struggling with their demons, and they would give anything to help break that cycle. We can help. We can start making good choices. We can support them. So as this problem gets worse, let's not let people feel abandoned and fearful.

There will always be challenges of the day but we cannot ignore the promises of the future. We have many to cherish and we have many to support, so they too deserve the fullness of our attention. I know each of us want the best for our young people so in this economy, we must be prepared to rise to that occasion. Opportunities like the polytech, it can bring in investments and educational opportunities for all Northerners as well as maybe new Northerners. Let us not miss this opportunity.

Now, keep in mind that one polytech will not replace a diamond mine but it's about the past. As we sit here with the gray economic cloud looming over the Northwest Territories, we must look at ways to diversify our economy. And therefore, we could also consider, not only as I suggest but as many suggest, the polytech could come on the property of the capital area site right near the Legislative Assembly as one option. So don't overlook at ripple effects. When you do one success, it can help spark other ones from one region to another region, from one community to another community, to one riding to another riding.

You know, they'll often say that the true hallmark of leadership is about inspiring others to get the best from them even at times when

it's even better than what we can do ourselves. That's teamwork; not worrying about getting the credit, but looking at the end result of what's meaningful for everyone. The system, therefore, must accept the inevitability of change. It is time we acknowledge that our Indigenous governments, our community governments, are our allies, not our competitors and hands down not our enemies. They are our friends. They are our colleagues. They are in this together with us. So we must not hold on to useless tenets and silly reasoning why we hold each other back. And so by example, by not transferring lands to community governments, to cities, to our partners so they can get on and do their business and do it right, we are holding them back. We're not supporting their economies. We must reflect on those choices. We can make the good choices by helping them. By standing with community governments and our Indigenous partners with their housing initiatives, it would be a clear application of support.

The GNWT does not control every single outcome, but it's time we become a clear single partner in the context of our support on and on. As I look to the fall of 2027, I want to talk about the end of our four years as I work towards the closing of my statement. Wouldn't it be nice to talk about the settling of land claims and settling -- and working through the implementation agreements? At the same time, wouldn't it be great to talk about the progressive steps we have taken to fully implement our wellness centres in our regions and support the homeless initiatives or provide housing and addictions care and aftercare and employment initiatives in all our regions? Wouldn't it be great in 2027? By fully funding communities, by supporting their needs, 2027 could be fantastic. And it starts today by the work we do together.

It wasn't that long ago when we lived in a prosperous era, and I don't think that that slippage is so far behind we can't remember it. We must inspire ourselves. We must act boldly and wisely to revive our economy and to build a foundation of lasting prosperity for everyone. The North is mineral rich. It may be infrastructure poor but the world needs us, and we have things for them to share.

Equally important, this Assembly needs to have a focus on putting money back in the pockets of Northerners. I have suggested a few ideas. There are many, many more. But we must revisit how we do business, and it must be a call to action on how we do this because the cost of living and the struggles are real. I do not hear one single riding saying everything is perfect. We have so many people needing other assistance, and we can do this together. And I

know it's not easy. We will disagree with each other and, as a matter of fact, probably quite regularly. And that's okay. That is a hallmark of democracy. But it's what we do with that disagreement on how we do it is what we can do to deal with these priorities and working for everyone.

I also understand that at any given day these challenges will be exhausting but I can tell you I'll be relentless.

So in conclusion, I want to start by saying that each of us ran -- sorry, let me try it again. At the conclusion, I want to point out that the start of each of our journeys really began with the thought of changing the narrative in our communities and how we can afford our energy and time and create solutions. But you're not alone. As you sit there in your chair, know this: You have 18 other Members who feel somewhat similar. Sometimes we're scared. Sometimes we're nervous. But we are all together. With approximately 1,379 days to go in this Assembly, time is short and before you know it, it'll be over.

So I'll leave you with this: However we found our way here, our job is to lift all regions of the North, help with the prosperity of all and all Northerners because the change in the people we may have been waiting for is actually here today. Congratulations, everyone. And thank you very much. Thank you

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Now call on the Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. RICHARD EDJERICON'S SPEECH

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I want to say mahsi to my constituents of Tu Nedhe-Willideh for putting me here to speak for them. Also I want to thank my family, my wife Aleta, who is at school teaching right now, all my children. And I just wanted to take this time to reflect about when I was first elected to the Assembly here.

As a Member of the Tu Nedhe-Willideh riding, I bring to this Assembly the concerns and priorities of my constituents. Since taking office, my efforts to advocate for my riding been met with limited acknowledgement and commitment from outgoing GNWT Premier and Cabinet. I'm hopeful that now with a full term ahead of us and the opportunity for new leadership, this change for the 20th Assembly building relationship and partnership.

Mr. Chairman, when I was first elected on February 8th, 2022, in a by-election, I heard clearly from my constituency about what are

very important to them and near and dear to their hearts. Outstanding is completing the Indigenous governments modern treaty and self-government agreements. I heard this every day since I been in this office here, winter road to Lutselk'e. I brought this to the House and they said well, I'm sorry, we got no money. Affordable housing, homeownership repairs, high-speed internet, commercial residential lot development. Kosmos 954 public inquiry, I raised that in this House.

Federal day school, April 1st, 1969, that's when the Government of Canada transferred the federal Indian Day School to the territorial government. But after that day, the abuse continued to happen for 26 years thereafter. Again, that needs to be addressed and talked about.

Also, the most important that keeps coming up, and I got to raise it here again today, is the Environment and Climate Change raid into Timber Bay culture camp. My constituents of Lutselk'e are asking that this government needs to apologize for that raid.

The other issues that I want to just briefly talk about is this, again, in my campaign trail I went to door to door in the communities. I listened to the elders. You know, the issues are -- in this campaign are no different than the last campaign. But there were some changes that were brought up.

The issues of winter road, and now they're talking about barging services and dust control in the community of Lutselk'e. The other issues is that MACA really has a limited amount of money is for residential lot development in our four communities. We haven't seen no new construction in our communities for a very long time. It's getting to the point now where housing corporation are buying old units or units in the community so they could build their own units in the community. That's a concern in my riding.

Mr. Chairman, the Kosmos 954 is a big one that I brought to this Assembly as well. I'm asking for an apology from the Prime Minister and also financial compensation. Since 1978, in April, we had a Russian satellite that came down, and it had debris coming from the east of British Columbia going to -- sorry, west from British Columbia going east and going over Hay River, Fort Resolution, Lutselk'e. There were debris found all the way up to Coppermine. And they had uranium that was in the atmosphere. They say it burnt up. But the people and the elders of my riding are very concerned about that because we have a lot of cancer rates after 1978. And that's something that needs to be looked at.

Mr. Chairman, also the Taltson hydro, we have graves that are in water that are 60 feet down when they flooded the water in that land in that area. The elders in my riding are asking to move those graves and before we even talk about doing any more expansion on the Taltson hydro.

The issues that come up I want to talk about is the Dettah school. In 1972, those ATCO trailers are -- it's been retrofitted over time. And not long ago I heard it was on the capital plan. It was taken off. At what point in time do we, you know, make the decision about building schools in our community? Education is an Aboriginal treaty right. And I want to remind that we have taken an oath to recognize that when we swore it here the other day. And we must continue to not lose sight of that.

The other issue that my colleagues talk about is the federal -- or sorry, the treatment facility here in the Northwest Territories. You know, this treatment facility that we talk about is -- it can't solely be beared only on the GNWT government because we got a very limited budget. The Government of Canada really needs to step up on this one here because we have residential school, federal day school. They got to take ownership of that. So having said that, that should include proper programming, probably include housing, aftercare, community-based programs, etcetera. We got to figure that one out. I did bring that up in the House as well.

In most communities in the Northwest Territories, we have new band offices and community halls. In N'dilo, we have an old gymnasium that was built back in 1978, and it's under size. The community, it's outgrown -- or sorry, the community's outgrown the community hall now. That needs to be looked at. That's something that I want to continue to advocate for our community. But my concerns is that, you know, we got -- we're going to have settled claims here in Northwest Territories sooner than later. And I had mentioned to my colleagues in the last Assembly and, again, I'll continue to advocate it here today, is that we must continue to recognize those constitutional protected land claim agreements. And we may have to look at some kind of constitution going forward. I think that's something that we need to talk about.

But, Mr. Speaker, I know we got limited amount of time. But I just want to talk about briefly is the state of affairs of this government. As much as we want to talk about all the stuff that we want to put in our communities, at the end of the day I think I heard from my colleagues that we had to put our house in order. And if we don't do that, you know, what do we do then? I often said

that we may have to review all the government departments because it -- we can't continue to do this. Mr. Speaker, we got \$2.2 billion budget. We are \$1.6 billion deficit plus another \$200 million added to it. Who's to say that this government here, and once we get the new Minister in there, they're going to come back and ask for more money? I'm concerned about that. This should be a full independent public review of the fire season that just occurred and the floods that happened. That's a concern that got to my attention. That impacted my community as well.

The thing is that the NWT is taking a huge hit on the economy and the GDP. The mining industry are winding down. They're now going to reclamation. Our young people need jobs. And we got to look at new ways to stimulate the economy here in the Northwest Territories. Right now -- as well, CBC reported that we lost over a thousand people. I think it's at \$40,000 per person that we get from Ottawa. That's \$40 million of our budget. At the same time, we -- our -- I keep thinking about the 3P initiatives that we undertaken as well. You know, we're paying down the hospital. We're paying down the bridge. You know, our dollar's getting really stretched. The question is how are we all going to come together and manage that? We all have needs in our community. And when I brought this stuff to the last Assembly, you know, the Premier said the train left the station and if you want anything on that train, try to put your luggage on there. Well, that train's took off already. So I have an opportunity here to really express what are the needs of my community. But overall, you know, the state of affairs of this government at this point is not really good.

The carbon tax, right now the Government of Canada had said that they're going to stop the carbon tax in western Canada. But here in the Northwest Territories, we got to go back and revisit the legislation on the carbon tax again, because the people in the Northwest Territories are paying high already in fuel costs and the carbon tax we have to pay on top of that. It's costing us anywhere from 1,800 to \$2,400 just to fill up your fuel tank. So that's the reality.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, is that we got to really look at our house. We got to start living within our means. Housing is a big issue. It's so bad that, you know, the housing corporation gets a budget, our finance people put money into its shared expenses, it's close to over \$200 million. But yet at the same time we're hurting at the local level for housing. And right now, the Indigenous governments are not going to Ottawa and get their own money for housing. And then so why do we have a housing corporation? In 2038, CMHC's going to

pull that funding away from them. They're done. So we got to look at that. So I guess at the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, is that this government here, we got to start living within our own means. And at the end of the day, we all got to work together and we have to build new relationships with Indigenous governments, industry, all stakeholders. With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland):

Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh. And thank you all Members for your thoughtful comments today as you embark on your priority setting process for your term. Today you've heard where each of you stands on many large and complex issues. The weeks ahead will involve communication and collaboration to reach a consensus on the priorities for the 20th Legislative Assembly. The territory looks forward to what you decide on together.

Members, we will see you at 2:15 in the Umingmak room to continue your orientation program. This concludes the public proceedings for today. Thank you.

---ADJOURNMENT