

OPENING ADDRESS
3rd Session of the 17th Legislative Assembly
Commissioner George Tuccaro

Creating the Conditions for Success

Speaker Jacobson, Premier McLeod, Members of the Legislative Assembly, Leaders, Chief-Superintendent Blake, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I open by congratulating the Members of the 17th Assembly, for the leadership you have shown since your election last fall and the vision you have developed for the Northwest Territories. That vision reflects the hopes and dreams of all Northerners. It envisions "Strong individuals, families and communities sharing the benefits and responsibilities of a unified, environmentally sustainable and prosperous Northwest Territories." The resilience of our people, the dedication of the public service, and your collective commitment and leadership make this vision eminently achievable.

Completing the Political Development of the North

Springtime brings new life to the North. The North comes alive with the return of migratory birds. New life brings new ways to adapt, new ideas for sustainability and a renewed happiness and good living.

My speech today marks a departure from the Commissioner's Address this Chamber has become used to. It is not the customary ceremonial welcome. Commencing today, it is much more. Similar to other Canadian jurisdictions, my address adopts the practice of laying out your government's agenda for the coming months, while touching on recent accomplishments and looking ahead to future challenges.

This change is one of many on the territory's road to political maturity. We see it in the evolution of this Legislative Assembly, which saw its beginnings as an appointed Territorial Council advising an appointed Commissioner on how to administer government programs in the Northwest Territories. Over the years, that advisory Council has become a fully-elected body with the power to enact legislation on behalf of the people of the NWT, led by an elected Premier and Cabinet who are responsible to this House for their decisions and policies.

This evolution tells only part of the story of our territory's political advancement. Another chapter is written in the ongoing devolution of federal programs and responsibilities to the Government of the NWT. Education, local government, policing, health care, forestry, highways, airports: each was devolved in turn. Each advanced our level of political self-determination.

One of the last remaining responsibilities still to be devolved is also one of the most critical. I am referring to the authority over public lands, water and resources. This is an authority of utmost importance and one which every province and territory except for ourselves and Nunavut enjoys. It includes the regulation of development, environmental protection, land use planning, the setting and enforcement of codes and standards, and, importantly, the levying of resource taxes or royalties. It will give Northerners the power to shape what happens in our own back yard, making us masters in our own home, masters of our own destiny.

Much is at stake in the transfer of this final power. Multi-millions of dollars in government revenues depend on it. The health of our resource sector and our environment depend on it. Your government remains as committed to devolution as any before it.

This afternoon I am pleased to inform you that the commitment to Devolution is paying off. I refer to the signing of the Devolution Agreement-in-Principle by representatives of the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated yesterday. The Sahtu will now join with the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the Northwest Territories Métis Nation in negotiating the transfer of authority over public lands, water and resources from Canada. This development is a reflection of the openness, the vision and the dedicated hard work of many people. I know you join me in congratulating the Sahtu.

The Sahtu's signing makes this a good day for Devolution in the Northwest Territories. However, there is still much work to do. We expect to conclude the Final Agreement before the end of the year. After that, it will take another 18 months to complete the planning required to implement devolution. I know our governments – the public, territorial government and Aboriginal governments – are up to the task and I look forward to a time when we as northerners, will have the authority to properly manage public lands, resources and water in a responsible, sustainable manner for the benefit of the current and future generations.

Strong Partnerships for a Strong North

My friends, yesterday's signing came about because of efforts your government has made to build strong working relationships with many different groups and people across the NWT. We are a small territory; we will need to work together if we want to achieve our goal of a prosperous, sustainable NWT that provides benefits for all of our people in every community and region. Achieving that goal will take the work and effort of not just your government, but also of Aboriginal and community governments, business and industry, environmental and social organizations and all people of the NWT.

As the public government for all residents, the Government of the NWT is responsible for considering the interests and needs of all the regions, people and groups in the NWT during our deliberations. Your government continues to reach out to people and organizations in every sector to help build the consensus and support it needs to achieve a better future for all our people.

It began last October – even before this House formally sat – when the entire Caucus of the Legislative Assembly met with leaders from all Aboriginal governments in Dettah. That meeting demonstrated the government’s interest in a new relationship with Aboriginal governments – one built on the principles of mutual respect, recognition and responsibility. The Premier and Cabinet have continued to follow-up on the start made at Dettah with bilateral meetings with Aboriginal government in every region of the Northwest Territories.

These formal government-to-government meetings represent progress toward the establishment of regular, ongoing meetings between Aboriginal government and the public government to discuss the issues of shared importance where we can make progress and find ways to strengthen our relationships. These meetings have shown us that while differences of opinion remain, there is in fact, a strong willingness and much common ground upon which to work together. For example, both the Tlicho Government and the Northwest Territories Métis Nation are working with your government to develop bilateral intergovernmental cooperation agreements that will formalize relationships and set out principles and protocols for the respective governments to work with one another.

This willingness to work together and find common ground forms the basis of advancing the Legislative Assembly’s priority of strengthening relationships in a spirit of mutual respect, recognition and responsibility will be expressed in a public statement of your government’s key principles and commitments with respect to engaging with Aboriginal governments and communities that will be tabled during this legislative session.

Community governments also have a critical role to play in supporting our residents and their aspirations. In recognition of this, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs is implementing an accountability framework to support this very important level of government. The accountability framework acknowledges the shared responsibility our governments have to manage public funds, makes it clear how your government will engage with communities and helps community governments report more transparently to their residents on how communities are being governed and how programs and services are being managed.

These meetings and our work on formal engagement processes with Aboriginal and community governments mark a different approach. It is a new approach that has the potential of bringing

Northerners closer together across the whole spectrum of human endeavour. It can unite us as a people, strong both in our unity and in our unique differences. It can bring business and government together in public-private collaborations. It can create new synergies by partnering with non-profit organizations, with municipalities, with Ottawa. It can leverage resource development by pooling interests with the mining and petroleum industries. It can foster environmental protection by finding common cause with conservation groups.

And while your government continues to build consensus at home, it will also look outside the NWT for partners it can work with. Chief among these will be the federal government, whose Northern Strategy aligns closely with this Assembly's own vision. Canada will be an important partner with this Assembly in creating a prosperous, self-sufficient territory and your government will continue to engage them on issues of interest to NWT residents.

Where there is trust and common cause there is unity. Where there is unity, there is no limit to what Northerners can accomplish. There's an old adage: a single ant can move a grain of sand, but an army of ants working together can move a mountain. I truly believe we Northerners can move mountains. I look to myself, to where life has brought me today, and I see first-hand that it really can be done.

Consider our generous resource base, our environment, our vibrant cultural heritage, our natural inventiveness, the youthfulness of our population. Everywhere one turns in the Northwest Territories, one sees the spirit of collaboration and mutual good will. This is our traditional way – to work together. To quote your Premier: "Our Territory is too small to be fragmented by issues that divide us. If we are to move forward, we will need to do it together."

My fellow Northerners, never were those words more true than today. We live in a time of fragile economies, vulnerable world markets and fiscal restraint. The government's resources – which pay for the programs and services our residents rely on – are limited. We need to work together to make collective decisions about the priorities we have as a territory and the best ways those priorities can be realized. The people of the NWT want an opportunity to succeed, to live healthy lives, participating as full members of a prosperous and stable society. It is the job of your government to create the conditions for that success, to put in place the programs and supports that will help our residents achieve their personal and collective aspirations. In the coming months, your government will continue to build on the good work it already does for our people, for our economy and our environment.

Creating the Conditions for Personal Success

Creating the conditions for personal success means addressing those issues that keep our people from achieving their full potential – poverty, poor health, lack of education, housing challenges. Your government is already taking action in these areas.

We can see it in *Building for the Future*, the new strategy introduced by the NWT Housing Corporation last month. This strategy responds directly to this Assembly's priority to address housing needs. It was based on the last government's Shelter Policy Review and was informed by extensive consultations with Northerners. This strategic framework builds on the success of existing housing programs and services and incorporates changes where they are needed. It extends across the whole spectrum of housing needs, from homelessness to homeownership, and across all types of communities. The strategy coincides with a new rent scale for the approximately 2,400 public housing units the Housing Corporation operates. The new scale is simpler. It is more predictable. It is fairer. And it fosters independence as opposed to dependence. The new rent scale will be implemented this summer.

We can see it in the work your government is doing to develop an anti-poverty strategy. Where there is poverty, one finds addictions, over-crowded housing, hunger, low literacy, ill health, family violence and unemployment. Over the last year, the Government of the Northwest Territories held discussions with residents, stakeholders, clients and frontline workers on how we can address poverty. What the government heard echoes something we already know: poverty is not something the government can tackle on its own. It is a complex and multi-faceted issue that we all – individuals, families, communities, governments, business, and volunteer and community groups – have a responsibility to work on. Individuals, their families and communities, other governments, volunteer and community organizations and business all have essential roles to play. Your government is now working with a broad array of stakeholders to develop an anti-poverty strategy that will be tabled in this House before the end of the calendar year.

Education is another key in helping the people of the NWT achieve personal success. Your government continues to work on that front as well. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment continue to implement the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative, designed to eliminate the education gap that exists between Aboriginal students and the rest of our school-aged population. This ten year plan takes a long term, developmental approach and tackles the challenges comprehensively, striving for an increased focus on early childhood development, more Aboriginal educators, higher attendance, greater parental support and better, more appropriate tools. Under this plan the Department has provided literacy coaches in each region of the territory and expanded its network of community libraries. The department is also

developing new Aboriginal language curriculum, supporting the orientation of teachers in Aboriginal culture and launched a campaign to increase school attendance. Steps this year will focus on working in collaboration with Aboriginal governments to engage parents more fully in their children's education.

This work also dovetails with work being done by ECE and the Department of Health and Social Services to renew the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action. Ensuring our children get the supports they need during their critical developmental years will have long-term benefits. Earlier this month, the Ministers of the two departments and the Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Programs co-chaired a meeting with Aboriginal and social program leaders to begin consultations on this subject. I look forward to seeing these cooperative efforts bear fruit among our children and youth.

Prevention is the most effective way we have of ensuring our residents lead healthy lives. With that in mind, the Minister of Health and Social Services will be presenting a Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan to guide the territory over the next three years. That plan will position the department to respond to those in need. In a similar vein, the department will soon commence work with its community, regional and territorial partners to develop community wellness plans. This focus on communities is also reflected in work the Department of Justice is doing with the RCMP on the development of community-based policing priority plans with each community in the NWT that will help ensure the safety and security of our residents.

I would also like to mention the Department of Public Works and Services, which supports the delivery of critical programs and services to our residents in all 33 of our communities through its management of the Digital Communications Network. Recent changes to the contract for the Digital Communications Network will ensure that it can better support services like digital imaging like x-rays, video conferencing for clinical service delivery, faster Internet access for schools across the territory and better support for distance learning applications.

Keeping Up Our End of the Bargain

Ensuring NWT residents are healthy and educated and free from addictions and mental health challenges is only one part of the picture. Government must also keep up its end of the bargain by working to create the conditions for economic success as well. Realizing our vision for our people also means ensuring that there are economic and employment opportunities available throughout our territory.

In response to the mandate provided by you, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment has initiated work to advance two planned and coordinated strategies for the future of mining and economic development in the NWT.

A mineral development strategy – developed in partnership with representatives of the mining industry – will serve to increase industry confidence and expenditures in mineral exploration and endorse the responsible and productive use of our territory’s great mineral wealth, providing jobs and economic prosperity for decades to come.

It will complement the development of a comprehensive economic development strategy that will identify challenges and opportunities for investment and growth, and build capacity in our communities and self-sufficiency among our people in a manner that reflects this Assembly’s key values of responsibility and environmental sustainability. At the same time, your government will be undertaking an initiative to reduce “red tape”, identifying and eliminating inefficient processes through internal reviews and consultations with the people of the Northwest Territories.

Investing in territorial infrastructure is another important aspect of your government’s work to create the conditions for economic success. As in all areas, the government’s economic initiatives are constrained. This demands that the government be scrupulous in how it targets its spending. The government has chosen a strategic approach. On the investment front, that means focussing on those infrastructure areas that will not only address our significant infrastructure deficit, but will also improve our service delivery and develop our economy. On the policy front, that means planning to ensure development is channelled in an orderly manner most beneficial to Northerners.

The government’s infrastructure priorities are laying the ground work for economic expansion that will create benefits for people in all communities and regions, further economic diversification and support Northern businesses. They include preparing for the construction of the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk portion of the Mackenzie Highway, and the ongoing planning for the southern stretches of that same road. These projects will open up vast new resources for development and lower the cost of living in nearby communities.

The Department of Transportation is currently responding to the environmental assessment requirements of the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk highway. That includes geotechnical investigations, surveys, consultations, and studies into fisheries, vegetation, wildlife, archaeology, and hydrology. It’s also examining procurement options, assessing the project risks and determining how to achieve the best value for money. This information is being compiled into a business case study to address the procurement and financing options.

As for the Mackenzie Highway's unfinished southern portion, the Department of Transportation continues to make progress on this project. Your government has made incremental investments totalling over 100 million dollars toward the development of an all-weather highway over the last ten years. The next step is to prepare a comprehensive project description report for use in the project's preliminary environmental screening. That was made possible by the completion of the regional project description reports. These reports were prepared in partnership with the land claimant groups along the proposed route, including the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation, Tulita District Land Corporation, K'ahsho Development Foundation and the Gwich'in Tribal Council. The involvement of these Aboriginal organizations has given the Mackenzie Highway project new momentum while ensuring maximum local involvement and buy-in.

This highway project complements and supports another critical infrastructure objective of your government. That's the construction of the Mackenzie Valley Fibreoptic Link down that same valley. This high-tech digital communications system will create tremendous benefits for all the communities along and adjacent to the route, including improved delivery of education and health services, and new business opportunities. It will enhance the quality of telehealth, closing the distance between patients and medical experts, cutting the cost of medical travel. It will improve access to clinical results and digital medical files, resulting in more timely patient care and treatment decisions. It will do the same for families and children in the care of social workers.

The fibre optic link is still in the feasibility stage. Studies indicate it could be built in the space of two years for an approximate cost of \$65 million. Your government is currently looking at options for financing the project as a public-private partnership.

Complementing the proposed fibre-optic link is the Inuvik Satellite Station Facility. This facility became a reality in 2011 and inaugurated its second dish just last month. While not a GNWT led or financed project, it is an example of how the NWT can benefit from innovative partnerships between the private sector and other governments. It has the potential to elevate that region from the boom-bust cycle of activities such as oil and gas and places it in the high-tech forefront. The territory's economy needs to diversify into more predictable, stable, sustainable industries. The Inuvik Satellite Station Facility is an ideal example of this. It has your government's utmost support.

The Northwest Territories also stands to benefit from the proposed Gahcho Kue diamond mine. Your government supports a balanced approach to development that is sustainable over the long term. It is committed to maximizing benefits this project for the people of the NWT and will be working towards this goal as part of the environmental impact review process.

That brings me to the largest, most important private sector project of all. The Mackenzie Gas Project is an enterprise of national scale that could play a key role in pulling Canada out of its economic slump. The Mackenzie Gas Project will contribute \$68 billion to the Northwest Territories economy and over \$86 billion to the Canadian economy, including 208,000 person-years of employment. It would mean the displacement of coal in the generation of electricity, making for a cleaner planet. It would also prompt the development of natural gas reserves along the entire pipeline corridor, reserves that otherwise remain inaccessible. Coupled with devolution, it would spell a new age of prosperity for the people of the territory.

For these reasons, your government remains committed to seeing this project proceed, in spite of some unfortunate delays. Those delays stem from a decline in gas prices, increased supply and need for a negotiated federal fiscal framework. Your government has been a source of stability in the unpredictable, high-stakes decision making environment the proponents face. Its ministers have traveled nationally and internationally in an open-handed effort to broker support for the project. These efforts are a direct reflection of the stated priorities of this Chamber. Much depends on them. I am confident they will bear fruit.

Access to the financial resources necessary to support our infrastructure investments is critical to our plans. Congratulations are in order to your Minister and Department of Finance who successfully concluded negotiations with Canada on a new borrowing limit for the territorial government this past March. The federally imposed limit has been raised to \$800 million from \$575 million. The new limit will help your government to fund other infrastructure priorities identified by you and future legislatures. Canada has been a cooperative partner in working towards a new borrowing limit and your Government appreciates their continuing efforts to support the North and Northerners.

The increased borrowing limit does not alter your government's current fiscal strategy. That strategy is to pay down increased short-term borrowing incurred to support the territorial economy. The new borrowing limit allows you to invest in strategic infrastructure projects that are required to deliver essential programs and services and develop our economy. I know you will use it wisely and with a view to the territory's long term benefit.

Protecting and Sustaining Our Northern Environment

My friends, one cannot talk about the wellbeing of Northerners and creating a prosperous territory without talking about the environment. The land is the source of our life and of our wealth as a territory. One of this Legislative Assembly's most important goals is "an environment that will sustain present and future generations." That includes the abundant

wildlife that we are blessed with: muskox, muskrat, moose, whales and waterfowl, fish and fur bearers, caribou, and so many other species.

Wildlife is an important source of income and nutrition. It is also intimately tied to culture. The territory needs legislation that incorporates the most current tools for managing that wildlife. This is vital to conserving our animal populations in accordance with your goals. Your cabinet proposes to use Bill 9, introduced in the 16th Legislative Assembly, as a starting point for consultation towards a new *Wildlife Act*.

The new bill will incorporate the results of additional consultations, including ministerial meetings with Aboriginal government leaders. Public information materials in plain language will be developed and widely distributed. Public meetings will be held in all regional centres. The objective is to present a new *Wildlife Act* during your fall session. It will offer an efficient system for wildlife management in the Northwest Territories that respects the rights and freedoms of all Northern residents. I look forward to proclaiming this new important legislation when it is passed.

The environment is larger than the living creatures that make it their home. It is the ice and the snow, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the landscapes that inspire us and the places that represent and symbolized our past. Your government recognizes this and is undertaking several initiatives in this area. I refer to the government's Water Stewardship Strategy, its Greenhouse Gas Strategy, and its Land Use Sustainability Framework.

Each has far reaching consequences for the people of the North, today and in the future. The Water Stewardship Strategy, for example, establishes a framework for water monitoring. That monitoring, and other activities under the strategy, will assist your government in negotiating trans-boundary water management agreements. Such agreements are essential for the protection of our Northern lakes, rivers and wetlands, especially in the face of development taking place in Alberta and British Columbia. Your government is concerned about downstream effects of developments there on the Mackenzie River Basin. For that reason, the first priority is a trans-boundary water management agreement with Alberta. Negotiations commence this year, continuing through 2013. The Departments of Environment and Natural Resources and Justice have been mandated with this important task. I know they will serve our territory's interests well, as do the dedicated employees of every territorial government department.

For many years, your government has demonstrated the importance of having a clear understanding and vision for managing the land and resources of our territory. This summer,

your government will be seeking input from all sectors of the NWT populace on what vision, principles and objectives should frame the management of lands and resources into the future. The product of this consultation and cooperative approach will be a land use and sustainability framework. The framework will build on existing cooperation relationships found in the settled lands, resources and self-government agreements and will allow the people of the NWT to know how their government will manage lands and resources in the future.

How development in the North is regulated is one of the most important ways we have of both protecting our environment and supporting economic growth. The Government of the Northwest Territories wants to see an integrated system of land and water management in the NWT based on settled land claims that functions in the public interest and allows for decisions to be made by NWT residents. Canada is currently undertaking a national initiative to streamline and increase the consistency of regulatory processes across Canada. This will affect the regulatory system here in the North. Your government, led by the Department of Executive, is working to ensure that the improvements being proposed by Canada will help streamline the regulatory regime while still ensuring proper environmental impact assessment, and respecting existing Aboriginal lands, resources and self-government agreements.

Public Service; Public Focus

I now turn my attention to the subject of our public service. It is mostly with a view to expressing my gratitude. This government is blessed with an exemplary public service. In hospitals and nursing stations they care for the sick. On the territory's byways they maintain the roads and keep them safe for drivers. They watch over aircraft as they land and take off. They count caribou, monitor water quality and answer phones. They manage our finances. When our babies are born healthy, when our graduation rates are increasing, when our economy has weathered the recession, when our government is well run ... we have the public service to thank.

Out of respect for its employees, your government will soon be entrusting them with a new moral responsibility. As part of its tentative agreement with the Union of Northern Workers, your government has committed to providing public servants with a way to report potential wrongdoing and will work towards the development of "Whistleblower" legislation for the consideration of this House during the life of the 17th Assembly.

I wish to acknowledge the government workers' unions for helping to give this issue the profile that it deserves. Our public service unions and employee associations are also to be commended for their cooperative approach to collective bargaining. They have been solid partners in the struggle to maintain fiscal balance, even as they pursue the very legitimate interests of those they speak for. In the past few weeks, your government has reached

tentative four-year agreements with the Union of Northern Workers, the Northwest Territories Teachers Association and the Northwest Territories Medical Association. When ratified, these agreements will help provide certainty and stability to our employees and the government both.

Conclusion

Much is worth celebrating as we look to the triumphs of this government, this Assembly and our territory. Yet there is a singular accomplishment that must be highlighted. I refer to the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the II. 2012 marks the 60th year of Her Reign. The Northwest Territories has joined with the Nation and the Commonwealth in commemorating this occasion. We are doing so by honouring those Canadians whose lives mirror Her own generous spirit of leadership and public service. I am pleased to be a part of the celebrations and to have a role in awarding some of the Diamond Jubilee Medals that will be presented this year. This medal recognizes the outstanding contributions of Canadians from all walks of lives to their communities and their country. Among them will be many Northerners. Our territory is blessed with more heroes and heroines than the limited number of available medals could ever acknowledge. I encourage everyone to nominate a deserving Northerner for this medal and know you will rejoice, as shall I, in each and every conferral.

On a personal note, this past year has been a gratifying one for me. I have visited throughout the territory and spoken to hundreds of Northerners. I have also traveled across the country and hosted many dignitaries from outside the territory. Most notable of those dignitaries was his Excellency, Governor General David Johnston.

I would also like to take time to remember those prominent Northerners who have left us for the spirit world. We will miss them, but their legacy will continue to live on in the lives of all those who knew and loved them.

I have outlined numerous government initiatives this afternoon. Each represents much forethought, careful coordination and tremendous hard work. I have every faith that these initiatives will succeed. Your leadership, our growing unity, and the grace of God, the Great Spirit, make this assuredly so. I commend your deliberations to the counsel of that Great Spirit now.

During this session, the Government of the Northwest Territories will be introducing the following bills for consideration by the House:

Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures), 2012-2013

Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 7, 2010-2011

Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures), No. 4, 2010-2011

Supplementary Appropriation Act (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 1, 2012-2013

Supplementary Appropriation Act (Operations Expenditures), No. 1, 2012-2013

The government considers these bills essential to the good conduct of government business and, as such, I recommend their passage.

As Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, I now declare open the Third Session of the 17th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, merci beaucoup, mahsi cho, quanani, koana.