



17th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Special Committee on Transition Matters

Passing the Mace:
Recommendations to the 18th
Legislative Assembly

Chair: Mr. Norman Yakeleya

MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Norman Yakeleya
MLA Sahtu
Chair

Robert Bouchard
MLA Hay River North

Alfred Moses
MLA Inuvik Boot Lake

David Ramsay
MLA Kam Lake

Daryl Dolynny
MLA Range Lake

Norman Yakeleya
MLA Sahtu

COMMITTEE STAFF

Tim Mercer, Clerk of the
Legislative Assembly

Penny Ballantyne,
Secretary to Cabinet

Mike Aumond, Secretary
to the Financial
Management Board

David Brock, Secretary
to the Special Committee

October 7, 2015

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Special Committee on Transition Matters is pleased to provide its Report on Transition Matters and commends it to the House.



Norman Yakeleya
Chairperson

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON
TRANSITION MATTERS**

**PASSING THE MACE: RECOMMENDATIONS
TO THE 18TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRANSITION MATTERS

PASSING THE MACE: RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE 18TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Transition is when one group of people willfully hands over political power to another group of people.

This year the Northwest Territories (NWT) will transition from the 17th Legislative Assembly to the 18th Legislative Assembly. This process will begin with the dissolution of the 17th Assembly on October 25th, followed by polling day for the general election on November 23rd, and the appointment of a new government soon thereafter.

The purpose of this joint Committee – the first of its kind – was to improve the transition process by providing the best advice of one Assembly to the next Assembly.

The Committee was mandated to describe the fiscal and decision-making context for the next Assembly, to make recommendations on how the transition process and the practice of consensus government could be improved, and to recommend priority policy issues for the next Assembly.

The recommendations of this Committee are not binding, but are for the consideration of members of the 18th Assembly.

State of the Economy

This chapter provides background information about the NWT economic outlook and the implications for GNWT revenues, including:

- A discussion of the NWT economy in a Canadian and global context and NWT linkages with the domestic and international economies;
- A summary of the current state of the NWT economy and prospects for future economic growth; and,
- A description of how government revenues are affected by economic growth.

The NWT economy was severely affected by the global economic and financial crisis in 2008 and not all aspects of the economy have returned to pre-recession levels.

The NWT economic outlook over the next five years is mixed at best. Although some regions are benefitting from resource projects, economic activity in other areas has either slowed considerably or declined.

Over the next 5 to 15 years, the data suggests a protracted decline in resource production. Existing diamond mines are maturing and identified potential mining operations will not replace the economic activity of current operations. Resource exploration, which is necessary for further development, is also slowing down.

Growing the NWT economy requires transformational investments such as the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Optic Link, the Mackenzie Valley Highway and addressing our energy cost and supply challenges. These strategic investments and other initiatives to lower costs for residents and businesses are vital for the long-term growth and sustainability of the NWT economy.

Finalizing remaining land claims would provide greater certainty on land ownership, clarify the terms of engagement among stakeholders for land access, and potentially make more land available for regional and community economic development.

The slow-growing economy produces a flat revenue outlook, which in turn means less fiscal resources to sustain programs and services at current levels.

Decision-Making Environment

This chapter describes major changes in the decision-making environment that may affect the consideration of future priorities by the 18th Legislative Assembly, including:

- the roles and responsibilities of public decision-makers in the NWT other than the territorial government;
- how the territorial government makes decisions; and,
- some emerging trends in citizen expectations of government.

Territorial government is not the only policy-maker in the NWT. Other major public decision-makers include the Government of Canada, regional Aboriginal governments, community governments, co-management boards, and territorial boards; and, courts of law are significant independent decision-makers in their own right. It is also important to continue to think about how all of these decision-makers fit together in governing the NWT.

Recognizing that there are other important public policy-makers in the NWT, the territorial government has the broadest mandate for policy-making within our borders. Our consensus government uses processes similar to those found in provincial capitals or in Ottawa, but without political parties or majority governments. The Executive Council is in place to provide leadership on policy initiatives and direct the civil service, while regular members are expected to help guide policy direction and hold the executive to account. It is the Executive Council that prepares and proposes budgets, but the Legislative Assembly ultimately approves spending in law.

Modern technology and increased connectivity throughout the territory has resulted in numerous approaches to public participation in policy making. For many, information is delivered with the speed of Google, goods delivered with the choice and efficiency of Amazon, and messages responded to instantly through Twitter or Facebook. As for government, it has a public duty to check that the information it sends is accurate, the goods it delivers are safe and accessible, and dialogue with the public is fair and inclusive. At the same time, increasingly, citizens expect government to work in cooperation with other groups and associations to develop public policy.

Recommendations on the Transition Process and Consensus Government

Term Length

The Committee recommends that the in-coming 18th Assembly retain the current four-year fixed date election schedule.

Territorial Leadership Selection

The Committee recommends that the in-coming 18th Assembly continue to elect members of the Executive Council.

Regional Balance on Cabinet

The Committee supports having regional balance on Cabinet, but does not make any recommendation on the way the 18th Assembly should arrive at regional balance on Cabinet.

Mid-Term Review

The Committee recommends that the out-going 17th Assembly establish a Process Convention on Priority Setting and Reporting, and that the in-coming 18th Assembly endorse this convention.

Priority Setting

The Committee recommends that the out-going 17th Assembly establish a Process Convention on Priority Setting and Reporting, and that the in-coming 18th Assembly endorse this convention.

Business Planning Process

The Committee recommends that the in-coming 18th Assembly conduct concurrent reviews of departmental business plans as well as amend sitting hours and the Orders of the Day during the budget session.

Transition Staging

The Committee recommends that the 18th Assembly also establish a Special Committee on Transition Matters during the last year of its legislative term.

Recommendations on Priorities for the 18th Legislative Assembly

Because of the long-term nature of our work, many of the priorities of the 18th Assembly will be similar to those of the 17th and earlier assemblies. This Committee wishes to highlight five key areas that members of the 18th Assembly should consider when discussing priorities.

They are not intended to be an inventory of everything government does, nor a catalogue of specific projects that individual members are passionate about. Not all members of this Committee agree on the relative importance of each priority, and they are presented in no particular order. Not everyone will agree that these should be the priorities of the 18th Assembly. That is a good thing.

- Reverse the social ills that hold our people down, particularly low education levels, addictions and poor mental health.
- Strengthen and diversify our economy in anticipation of impending diamond mine closures.
- Complete devolution of land and resources and implement a regulatory system that reflects the values of our residents and partner governments.
- Rein-in the increasing cost of living, particularly energy, housing and food.
- Plan for and adapt to a changing climate in the North.