



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

19th Assembly

**TERRITORIAL LEADERSHIP
COMMITTEE**

Thursday, August 27, 2020

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Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

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(Mackenzie Delta)

Mr. Ronald Bonnetrouge
(Deh Cho)

Ms. Caitlin Cleveland
(Kam Lake)

Ms. Paulie Chinna
(Sahtu)

Ms. Caroline Cochrane
(Range Lake)

Ms. Julie Green
(Yellowknife Centre)

Mr. Jackie Jacobson
(Nunakput)

Mr. Rylund Johnson
(Yellowknife North)

Mr. Jackson Lafferty
(Monfwi)

Ms. Frieda Martselos
(Thebacha)

Ms. Katrina Nokleby
(Great Slave)

Mr. Steve Norn
(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

Mr. Kevin O'Reilly
(Frame Lake)

Ms. Lesa Semmler
(Inuvik Twin Lakes)

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, August 27, 2020****Members Present**

Mr. Blake, Mr. Bonnetrouge, Ms. Chinna, Ms. Cleveland, Ms. Cochrane, Ms. Green, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Martselos, Ms. Nokleby, Mr. Norn, Mr. O'Reilly, Ms. Semmler, Mr. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Rocky Simpson, Ms. Thom, Mr. Thompson, Ms. Wawzonek

Call to Order

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the Territorial Leadership Committee to order. Before we begin, I would like you to rise, and I would like to ask Mr. Thompson to lead us in the opening prayer.

Prayer

---Prayer

Review and Adoption of Guidelines and Procedures

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. Thompson. This is the third meeting of the Territorial Leadership Committee for the Members of the 19th Legislative Assembly. All Members have a copy of the agenda for today's meeting in front of them. In addition to the agenda, all Members have a copy of the previously agreed-upon guidelines and procedures for this meeting of the Territorial Leadership Committee. These guidelines and procedures maintain the existing geographic balance on Cabinet. As such, only Members from Kam Lake, Great Slave, Frame Lake, Yellowknife Centre, and Yellowknife North are eligible to stand for this Executive Council position. To confirm, does committee still agree with these guidelines and procedures?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Mr. Norn.

MR. NORN: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairperson. I disagree with this convention, and if you would allow me to speak to this, I will speak to that.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Mr. Norn would like to speak to the convention. Mr. Norn.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Mr. Chairperson. After looking at this and thinking about this very thoroughly, I do have whom I consider Yellowknife constituents in the communities of Ndilo and Detah, which are within Yellowknife city limits, and I believe that I could stand and put my name forward for this nomination.

I will share this story with the other Members. Just before Christmas, we sat down as Yellowknife MLAs. We talked about different initiatives, that we could use our budgets to take part in Yellowknife events in Ndilo and around Yellowknife, and I agreed at the time. Then it came apart, and this is, kind of, a little bit humorous, but it's not. We talked about Christmas cards, and, okay, sure, we could have all the Yellowknife MLAs sit and take pictures, and we could all show to our constituents around the Yellowknife area that we are Yellowknife MLAs, and I thought, okay. I said yes originally, and then I thought, you know, I do have constituents in Lutselk'e and Deninu Kue. I don't think they'd appreciate that, so I declined.

After thinking about that, if I am good enough to be part of that conversation, to use my budget for Yellowknife events and to be part of a Christmas card, I think that I am good enough to be part of this nomination process. I thought I would just share that with you, and with that, I would like to see how my colleagues stand on this matter. Marsi cho.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. Norn. I open it up for discussion. Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. The two from the North, two from the South, and two from Yellowknife protocol has been in place for many years. It is a semi-constitutional principle of consensus government. It simply cannot be changed without much thorough discussion. This is, in fact, on our Caucus agenda for this upcoming weekend, the principles of consensus government.

When we were talking about the southern candidates, Mr. Norn could have put his name forward previously. There was never any discussion about whether he could put his name forward for Yellowknife in the previous TLC. To now say that he is a Yellowknife MLA, it essentially removes a candidate from the southern constituencies, which already has the least number of MLAs. We need to keep that balance of having an appropriate number of MLAs in the South, Yellowknife, and the North.

This conversation has previously happened. The Legislative Assembly set out how this TLC would occur. I don't believe we need to be having this discussion. Let's have the TLC. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Mr. Johnson. Mr. Norn, we will finish off with you after everybody speaks. Any further discussion? Ms. Cleveland.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. I feel that one of the most important parts of what we do here is inclusion and making sure that we have diversity at the table and diverse representation at the decisions that are made. My fear in making this decision today, I feel that it is a much bigger decision that does need to happen. I'm happy that it's on a Caucus retreat for the weekend, but I feel that my biggest fear is that, down the road, in a future Assembly, that somebody will decide that the two, two, and two doesn't need to hold. My fear would be that representation of everybody from all regions doesn't hold and that a region like the North, which has the lowest population in the Northwest Territories but has some of the biggest challenges in the Northwest Territories, ends up with the least amount of representation at the table, and that would be devastating. I think that it is really important that we end up with equal representation of all of our regions at the Cabinet table. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Ms. Cleveland. Any further discussion? Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Chairperson. [Translation] Today is a very important day. When we speak about conventions, this has been an issue in the rules and regulations forever, and sometimes there are changes. So far, we have had a Premier from Yellowknife for three terms. There could be changes for Tu Nedhe and Wiilideh. We have a Member who is part of Yellowknife, Fort Resolution, and Lutselk'e, as well.

If we take a look at the whole process, the whole territorial government, when Yellowknife was created back in the day, these are the most important people here who we are living among. When you look at Tlicho, they are important, as well, but it's never important, it's never an issue that we should be able to respect and listen to these people who have been here forever. This has been an issue for all people, with the Yellowknives Dene and Wiilideh, as well, and it is very important that we listen, but at times, it's like we never listen to them. They are living right here among us. Sometimes, they come to our meetings. They have a ceremony for us, drumming for us, and yet, we don't recognize that.

When we look at Wiilideh, at that riding, Joe Handley and Bob Bromley, they are from Yellowknife, and now Yellowknife North, and he sits now for Yellowknife Inghram Trail, and yet, it's considered as Yellowknife. When you look at Ndilo and Yellowknife, that's part of the City of

Yellowknife. We have issues with them. We deal with them. There are programs of all sorts, working on the roads, doing the paving. So what do we do? They're part of the municipality service, as well, with Yellowknife. They also have programs with Yellowknife.

Mr. Chairperson, so many times I have brought these issues before. If it's only for a Yellowknife riding, we cannot leave one out. When I look at this, when I look at it, we should have all aspects of people who want to be able to run. That would be appropriate. We saw what has been going on this week, and now we are here. So what do we do? When we are going to be able to select, we should be able to look at this whole process again. This is what I would like to see. Right now, I would be able to stop. When we speak, like right now, when we see, we would be able to bring this up again. I would like to make an issue out of it and leave it at that. Thank you. [Translation ends]

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Any further discussions? Ms. Cochrane.

MS. COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This puts me in a difficult position. There are conventions that we do. There was a reason for it. We haven't had an opportunity during this session to actually have the reasoning presented to us: why did this come out in the beginning? I'm going to make a guess. The reasoning was probably to ensure that there was balance, equal representation on Cabinet is my guess. I have nothing to confirm that. The Premier and Cabinet has zero vote. There's a lot of say that has zero vote so, in fact, actually, where we sit today with one Yellowknife Minister being taken out is that we only have one Yellowknife Minister who has a vote in Cabinet.

I always look at fairness. If it was a small-community Minister, would we be having this conversation? I try to look at that. The bigger thing for me, Mr. Chair, is that I did get a couple of phone calls from Indigenous leaders with concerns. There is division amongst them. My job as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, I think that it's important to consult with our stakeholders and especially if we really respect government-to-government and equal partnership with our Indigenous governments. I think this is something that needs to have a bigger discussion, Mr. Chair, so I think this is a rash decision that I think needs more time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Ms. Cochrane. Any further discussion. Mr. Simpson, Senior.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. There is no doubt that, I guess to start off here, I had a chance to think about this last night

and this morning, and there is no doubt that the region of smaller communities need additional support, and how that comes, I'm not quite sure. We have to have that discussion in a bigger discussion. Right now, we're in the 11th hour and we've got work to do. This convention has been in place. I assumed that we had all agreed to it.

For myself, I've got constituents out there who are looking for work. We've got people out there looking for housing. We've got lots of issues out there. Those issues, I think, are probably bigger than what we're talking about at this 11th hour. I'll support the two, two, and two right now, but I would like to have that discussion at some point, on how we look at small communities in the regions, because we are left out in a way. We don't have access to Ministers like MLAs in Yellowknife have. We don't have access to those services, so I think it's important that we discuss it. Again, it even goes bigger than that. We have to look at this government. People talk about consensus government working; consensus government not working. We talk about party politics. We talk about the possibility of maybe the claimant, Indigenous organizations, maybe, regionally, making up the government. Those are issues that we have to discuss, and I think that is probably better left for a later day and more than a few hours to discuss.

At this point in time, after careful consideration, I am going to support that we just stay with the two, two, and two. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. Simpson. Any further discussion? Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The two, two, and two convention has been in place since 1999, over 20 years. That's the way that previous Assemblies have set themselves up, and there was very good reason for doing that, to try to ensure that there is some form of regional balance in terms of the make-up of Cabinet. This issue was reviewed by the transition matters committee in the last Assembly. Some of us sat on that committee. We gave it careful consideration, and we couldn't even agree amongst ourselves as to how to change it, so the committee was silent on the issue but said that this is something that does need some examination. In fact, that committee recommended that it should probably be rolled into a future mandate for the Electoral Boundaries Commission as part of our constitutional development discussions and debate.

I am more than a bit surprised that this has come to the floor this morning. I had no notice from the honourable Member that this was going to come to the floor, and I don't think that's the way we should be trying to do business, especially at this time.

I have worked very hard for most of my adult life in the Northwest Territories to support and work closely with Indigenous governments. My time on city council, we had not a great relationship with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, but I worked to help negotiate a memorandum of understanding so that we could have joint council meetings. I've worked closely with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation on Giant Mine issues, and I think I still have a good working relationship with their leadership. While I have some sympathy with some of the arguments, perhaps, put forward by my friend, Ndilo is within the city limits. Detah is not. There are discussions, of course, ongoing between YKDFN and the City of Yellowknife about their relationship moving forward and where a boundary may be drawn. In fact, I'm the one who actually brought the issue of Yellowknife MLAs being able to use our constituency work expense allowance to assist with events in Ndilo. If you want to blame somebody for bringing that issue forward, you can blame me. I believe it was the right decision on the part of the Board of Management in the last Assembly to allow Yellowknife MLAs to do that.

This issue of constitutional development and the regional representation within Cabinet, which is a part of a much bigger discussion, it is something that we set our minds to at the beginning of this Assembly, and we agreed at that point to maintain that. I am not prepared to reopen that discussion at this point. I believe this is something that is a live issue. There needs to be an opportunity for public input and debate, and there will be none if this proceeds in this manner here this morning. I don't believe that that's appropriate.

These are matters that I think we should ask an Electoral Boundaries Commission to examine. That is something that we are going to discuss this weekend in Fort Smith, on what sort of mandate they may have, and I believe it is time to have this kind of discussion and debate as it is at any point in our history. However, to try to do this on the fly, on the floor of the House this morning, I didn't know about this: no public debate, no opportunity for the public to have any discussion. I don't think this is the right time or place to do it.

Lastly, Mr. Chair, as I understand the rules for the Territorial Leadership Committee are set by Caucus. We do not have the authority to change that ourselves. If a change is to be made, this needs to go back to Caucus. I do not want to have another discussion in Caucus about this. I think we need to finish this debate discussion and proceed, and we need to do this in a unified manner. Trust and relationships, we have to start to move forward in a unified way to get results for our communities, for our people. I want to get back to work. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly. Any further discussion? Minister of Finance.

MS. WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. The discussion that has been introduced this morning, to me, goes to the very core of the structure of consensus government. It goes to the representation in the House, and it goes to the representation for all people in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Chairperson, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does guarantee equal representation. That doesn't mean perfect equal division by number or by perfect lines, but it does have a constitutional principle at play about equal representation for all people in Canada, including the people of the Northwest Territories. It's a constitutional principle. It's a principle of democracy, and it's one that needs to be debated by all the Members who are here, but we need to have that debate in a way that is informed, where we can have due consideration of the constitutional principles at play, due consideration of the needs of the people of the Northwest Territories, where we can give consideration to ensuring that all of the small communities who feel under represented have a voice and know that they have a voice, but also that the people in Yellowknife, who are 50 percent of the population, also have a voice, that they continue to have a voice.

Mr. Chairperson, in my view, the Northwest Territories is still a whole, and if the small communities falter, Yellowknife will falter; if Yellowknife falters, the small communities will falter. Vice-versa, if the small communities can succeed and have that voice and are confident with their voice, Yellowknife's going to do well, too. If Yellowknife is doing well, the small communities should be doing well. We need to find a way so this debate is unified and that we can actually go forward and feel that every person in the Northwest Territories has that equal representation that's guaranteed to all of us in the Charter.

Mr. Chair, that's really the extent of what I can provide this morning. I think more needs to be provided to every Member here, and we should be hearing from all of our constituents before we make this fundamental change. Mr. Chair, I am not in favour of having any further debate from my side. I am not in favour of making this change right now, but I'm very much in favour of having this discussion.

I will give one last comment, which is that I think one of the other Members said we need to look at the whole process, and I agree. Unfortunately, that has been built into the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, where every second sitting, there

is a requirement that we actually go out and have some consideration of these issues. That is coming up this term. This House and this Assembly have an obligation to go out and have this exact discussion in an organized fashion. Really, when the Member says we get down to work, maybe this is one of the items we need to get down to work on very soon. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Minister Wawzonek. Any further discussion? Ms. Martselos.

MS. MARTSELOS: I did not know this was coming to the floor. I have always spoken about smaller communities and regional centres. I spoke about it because I know that we can make change in the future, and I thought that is what we were going to be doing. It took me by surprise that the few Members that I thought would confide in me with something like this did not say anything to me. As far as I'm concerned, Fort Resolution and Lutselk'e are part of the South Slave, and now I'm told, "No. We want to be considered a part of Yellowknife."

A lot of us bring a lot of qualities to this House, and, as a Member from Thebacha, I feel I bring a lot of qualities, too. One of the qualities that I always brought was honesty, integrity, and up front. I like to know things before I come here, whether it's good or whether it's bad, and then I would make a decision on it. Being thrown this at the 11th hour is not the way I do business.

I'm all for Indigenous governments to move forward, always have been, but coming through the side door to try to change things at the 11th hour when we had this discussion at the very beginning and no one seemed to want to participate unless it's the person they want is not the way to go. I strongly feel that, when we have had this discussion, we have to try and get the best people for the job on the Executive Council. I strongly feel that. I'm going to leave it at that because I feel that, as one of the Aboriginal Members in this House, I deserve that. With that, I'm just going to leave it at that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Ms. Martselos. Any further discussion? Ms. Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Chair, I just want to kind of go back to where we started. We did have this discussion, as some of the Members have said, when we first got here. There was discussion about what the split should be. Some of us, like we said, we had the Transition Matters Report to ensure that small communities, regional centres, and Yellowknife would be represented. We have that. Right now, we have a Member from Yellowknife that is vacant. I meant there is a seat vacant, so we have two Members who are representing small

communities, one from the North and one from the South.

The convention that we decided then, we had discussions, again, about it, we all decided; the majority decided. This is consensus government. We had a majority. We moved forward on what we decided. We have had a lot of other things going on this week. The people of the Northwest Territories deserve us to get to work. This, to me, is not as important as some of the things that are going on in my community that have needs. I need to ensure that, in the future, we respect this convention, these decisions that we make because I don't ever want to see my region, the North, not being represented in this Cabinet because nobody knows better how it is to be in the North than people from the North who have lived in the North.

I will honestly say I don't know what it's like to live in the South. I've had very short few times where I had to live in Yellowknife in my previous life. That is not where I have the expertise. I think today, like we said, the majority, this is where our convention sits, and I agree with keeping it as two, two, two, the way it's been. That is all. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Ms. Semmler. Any further discussion? Mr. Norn.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho, Mr. Chair. Thanks, all my colleagues, for the comments and for talking about this. What I'd like to say and after thinking this through, as well: as back as far as the 15th Assembly, the riding of Weledeh was considered a Yellowknife riding. Mr. Handley was the Premier and held that seat for quite some time. Through changes since then, my riding has now been amalgamated, and it's now Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

We are talking about convention. We did break convention, too, by having a Yellowknife Premier for consecutive terms. Really, we didn't question that, as well. There was no question; there was no debate in here; there was no uproar. I listened to my colleague from Yellowknife North. Just reading between the lines, it sounds like my constituents from Ndilo are not part of Yellowknife. That is what I'm hearing. I'm hoping that my other colleagues don't feel that way.

I won't take too much of your time, but really thinking through all this from a high level, there are imbalances in here. Too many of our people, our Aboriginal populations, are in jails, are not being hired on our processes, the way we are running it. Our businesses are wanting. Our Aboriginal businesses are wanting. No more. I feel like I'm speaking for my ancestors when I want to stand up here. That is what I'm here for. I feel right here, right now, this is my calling. This is what I'm here for. I

will never stop fighting for the little guy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. Norn. Seeing the majority are not in favour of this at this time, we won't put it to a vote unless everybody wants to. I think we will just carry on. Okay.

Review and Adoption of Agenda

The next item on the agenda is the review and adoption of the agenda. Are there any additions or deletions to the agenda? Seeing none. If not, the agenda is adopted. Are we agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Agreed. Thank you. I wish to remind Members that our proceedings today are being broadcast live on the Legislative Assembly television network and on social media. Our proceedings today are being simultaneously translated into Tlicho, Chipewyan, and French. I would also like to remind Members that, although this is a less formal committee than the House itself, Members are required to stand while speaking. Further, as this is a meeting of the Territorial Leadership Committee and not a sitting of the House, our guidelines require that you address me as the Chair rather than as the Speaker.

Election of Minister

The next on the agenda is the election of a Member of the Executive Council. The process for selection of a Member of Executive Council will begin with self-nominations from the floor.

Nominations

I will now ask all Members from the agreed-upon constituencies who wish to allow their name to stand for this position on the Executive Council to please rise. Thank you, Mr. Norn. Unfortunately, you're not eligible to let your name stand under the existing guidelines.

MR. NORN: Marsi cho for the indulgence, Mr. Chairperson. I would like to address the House really quickly before I sit down. Is that okay, Mr. Chairperson?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): [Microphone off]

MR. NORN: I'd like to say something really briefly.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): If it's okay with committee.

MR. NORN: This is not the first time that I've been stifled by the system. Marsi cho, Mr. Chairperson.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Mr. Norn.

Results

Members, as Ms. Green is the only nominee for the position on the Executive Council, it is my duty to advise you that Ms. Green has been acclaimed to serve on the Executive Council. Congratulations, Ms. Green. Would you like to say a few words?

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I ran for this position in October because I thought I had a lot to bring to the Executive Council. I have experience in very diverse fields. Just briefly, I worked for CBC in a number of different places in Canada and for nine years here, and in that time I was able to travel widely through the NWT, to a total of 27 communities, and really get a feel for the diversity of circumstances in which people live and of the people themselves. I feel that that had served me very well in my first term, when I was a Regular Member, and of course at that time in the Regular Member Caucus we had all of the small community members, so we were very alive to the issues that they brought forward.

I want to say about the 18th Assembly that we never failed to support the small-community MLAs in their requests. An example I'll give you is the Small Community Employment Fund. That was something that Mr. Thompson and Mr. Beaulieu lobbied very hard for and which ultimately was successful.

I am very excited by this opportunity. I see it as a fairly daunting process. There is a tremendous amount of division in this House, and it is being fuelled by both inside and outside actors. It has brought us to a point of real division, where we are today. What we need to do is to stop with that path, with that direction, and we need to start working together. We need reconciliation with the people who are aggrieved and continue to express that in their different ways. I have heard a need for better communication. Since I have been able to establish relationships with the Regular Members in the past nine months, I feel that I am off to a good start there. I have been able to work with the people on this side of the House, and I also look forward to working closely together with the Executive Council, obviously, but also with the Regular MLAs. I am very aware of the issues that you raised with the revocation motion yesterday, and I will address them to the best of my ability.

I want you to know, finally, what I've said at the end of every nominations speech. I have made no promises and none have been made to me. I am standing here on my own merits, and I appreciate your confidence. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake Jr): Thank you, Ms. Green. Members, Ms. Green will be recommended for the appointment of the Executive Council by way of formal motion in the House. I would like to thank everyone for your contributions and participation today.

Adjournment

This meeting of the Territorial Leadership Committee is now concluded. We are adjourned. Thank you.

---ADJOURNMENT