



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

0th Session

Day 2

20th Assembly

**TERRITORIAL LEADERSHIP
COMMITTEE**

Thursday, November 30, 2023

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Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

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(Yellowknife Centre)

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(Nunakput)

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Mr. George Nerysoo
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(Inuvik Boot Lake)

Ms. Lesa Semmler
(Inuvik Twin Lakes)

Mr. R.J. Simpson
(Hay River North)

Mr. Kieron Testart
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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, November 30, 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. Yakelaya.

The House met at 9:00 a.m.

Call to Order

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Glen Rutland): Good morning, Members. As clerk, it is my duty to call the first meeting of the Territorial Leadership Committee to order, preside over nominations for Premier and the subsequent candidate speeches. We will begin for a prayer from the Member for Thebacha.

Prayer

---Prayer

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Before we begin, I would like to thank those in the public gallery for attending and those watching at home for joining us here for the first meeting of the Territorial Leadership Committee of the 20th Legislative Assembly. Welcome.

I would also like to draw Members' attention to the presence of Premier Cochrane, Member of the 18th, 19th Legislative Assembly, who is currently Premier, and also the Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, Brenda Gauthier.

Review and Adoption of Agenda

Members, you each have a copy of today's agenda before you. Are there any additions or deletions to the agenda? Seeing none. Is the agenda adopted?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Members.

Opening Remarks by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Members, you have agreed upon a process to select a Premier as follows: Today, Members wishing to allow their names to stand for Premier will each identify themselves publicly and make a speech of up to 20 minutes. When all candidates for Premier have given their speeches, the proceedings will adjourn until Thursday, December 7th, 2023, at 9 a.m. where you will begin by electing a Speaker. Following the election of the Speaker, the Premier candidates will participate in a question and answer session where each Member will be entitled to ask up to two questions to the Premier candidates. Your questions will be addressed equally to all candidates. And I ask that you keep your questions short and specific. Likewise, candidates will be asked to limit their responses to no more than two minutes.

Once the question and answer session is complete, Members will cast their ballots for the selection of Premier.

Following the election of the Premier, you will proceed to identify, hear speeches from, ask questions to, and elect an Executive Council.

Following that, that will conclude the business of the Territorial Leadership Committee.

Nominations for Premier

The next item on today's agenda is nominations for the Premier. The Premier nomination guidelines are in the package on your desk. As per those guidelines, I will now ask that all Members who wish to allow their names to stand for the position of Premier to please rise in their place. Thank you.

- Mr. Simpson,
- Mr. Thompson,
- Mr. Testart, and
- Ms. Wawzonek.

Is there anyone else who wishes to stand for Premier? Seeing no one else, those will be the nominees for Premier today.

We will now proceed to speeches from the candidates for Premier. Each candidate is permitted 20 minutes to deliver their speech. The speeches will be made in alphabetical order by surname. As such, I will call upon Mr. Simpson, the Member for Hay River North, for the first speech. Mr. Simpson, the floor is yours.

Candidates' Speeches

MR. R.J. SIMPSON'S SPEECH

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Thank you, colleagues. I often think what the NWT could look like in 50 years. We are in such a unique position. There is nowhere else like the NWT. And when I think about the future of this territory, it looks like nothing else I've ever seen.

I see an NWT that is thriving, natural ecosystems that are thriving, cultures and languages that are thriving, economies that are thriving, self-governments that are thriving, and a system of cooperative governance that is unique in the world. This can be a reality. The 19 of us in this room have the rare honour to help propel this territory in that direction.

I am running for Premier because I want to help make this vision a reality. I say help because no one person can do it alone, not the Premier or the Cabinet or all 19 Members of the Legislative Assembly or the thousands of GNWT employees. We can only achieve this vision if we all work together.

Inscribed on the mace of the Northwest Territories is the phrase One Land, Many Voices. When I was first elected, I used to think that having one land with many voices was a challenge; however, after travelling through the North and working with representatives from every corner of this territory for the past eight years, I see that it has the potential to be our greatest strength. To harness this strength, we must build upon the work that began in the last government.

Continuing the work of the Council of Leaders by working with Indigenous governments to co-develop an action plan to achieve the objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples; and,

By continuing to advance land claim and self-government negotiations which have been spurred on by recent changes to the GNWT's negotiating mandate; and,

Begin finalizing agreements within the next four years.

To achieve the 50-year vision I described, we must wholeheartedly commit ourselves to these actions. 50 years in the future is a long ways away, and there is much work to be done to achieve this vision. There is also much work to be done to address the issues we're facing today.

We all know that we face many challenges here in the North. We lack adequate social housing which negatively impacts our people's health and wellness. We lack market housing which hinders businesses' ability to grow and prevents governments from filling positions needed to deliver services. Trauma is prevalent across the North resulting in ongoing issues with addictions, and we are seeing new and more harmful drugs entering our communities. There is a lack of health care professionals and increasing competition across Canada for those positions. We have a high cost of living, especially in our communities that are not connected by all-season roads. Natural disasters are impacting communities across the territory, and the risk will only increase. Just hearing this list of challenges is enough to make someone throw their hands up in despair. How can we possibly address all of these issues? Well, that's exactly what we signed up to do.

While we won't solve each and every one of our problems in the next four years, I'm confident that this Assembly can start us down the right path and that we can make significant headway in addressing them. It won't be easy, and we all know that. Throwing more money at government is not the solution. Every year we've been spending more and more and the Government of the Northwest Territories is bigger than it's ever been, but we're not seeing the results we want. There isn't enough money to keep increasing our budget at this pace, and there aren't enough workers to fill all the positions we currently need filled. Likewise, we cannot rely on the Government of Canada to increase our funding. We can continue to lobby them but we must ensure our fiscal house is in order if we expect them to consider our requests. However, by working with Indigenous governments and by finalizing land claims and self-government agreements, more money will flow into the NWT, our residents will be better supported, industry investments will increase, and the quality of life of our residents will rise.

To be frank, I believe the GNWT is stretched too thin. We're trying to do too many things and, as a result, we're only doing them halfway. We need to go back to the basics. If we want to tackle the major issues, we need to focus our efforts and devote adequate staff and

resources to those ends. While the Premier must understand the issues in the territory, it is not their role to determine which issues to tackle. The priorities of this government will be decided by the 19 Members of the Legislative Assembly. The Premier's role is to bring the territory together, lead the GNWT, and use the machinery of government to pursue those priorities and to oversee the regular day-to-day delivery of services.

So what makes me think I can do this?

Although I am well acquainted with many of you, some of us have only gotten to know each other over the past week and a half. I'm a lifelong resident of Hay River. My father Rocky Simpson was also born and raised in Hay River and has worked up and down the Valley. Even today, in many communities I am better known as Rocky's son than Minister Simpson, except here in Yellowknife, of course, where I'm better known as Keelan's brother. My mother's family are settlers from Manitoba. My parents met in Inuvik in the 1970s and settled back in Hay River shortly after. I've lived in the south while my parents attended post-secondary and, later, when I earned an undergraduate degree in psychology from Grant MacEwan University followed by a law degree from the University of Alberta. The value of education was instilled in me at an early age, and I know firsthand the advantages, opportunities, and freedoms that it provides. That said, I didn't finish law school until I was 34 so I spent a number of years working in different areas - from the service industry to sales to office work to construction - learning valuable lessons from each experience.

After law school, I returned to the North and was set to begin a career practicing law in late 2015. As fate would have it, the territorial general election was just around the corner, so I put my name forward and was elected in November 2015.

During my first term in the 18th Assembly, I was a Regular Member. I sat on the Standing Committees on Government Operations and Economic Development and Environment. I was also the deputy Speaker and chair of the Committee of the Whole, which meant I sat at that table and listened to countless hours of debate in this House. Those four years provided me with the unique education and valuable insights into the legislative process about what the government actually does and about the relationship between government and its residents. I also experienced the relationship between Cabinet and Regular Members from the perspective of a Regular Member.

In 2019, I was elected to the 19th Legislative Assembly and Cabinet. I was appointed Government House Leader and Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and less than a year later I was also appointed Minister of Justice. I took what I learned as a Regular Member and immediately put it to use, with a focus on improving how Cabinet interacts with Regular Members. Liberal sharing of information, transparency, and dialogue with Regular Members have been my default positions. While that might sound easy, it takes a concerted and sustained effort. As Premier, I would expect all Ministers to put in the same effort.

As Minister of education, I've been fortunate enough to initiate large scale changes in a number of areas across the department. My work with constituents and on standing committees as a Regular Member led me to focus on ensuring programs are delivered in ways that prioritize respect for residents, ease of access and use, and enhanced flexibility over the traditional focus of minimizing risk to the GNWT.

You will see this in the revamped income assistance program and the new income assistance for seniors and persons with disability programs that will roll out in the new year. We made the biggest changes to these programs in a generation to improve the quality of life for residents, especially for seniors and persons with disabilities, and to remove the barriers that were actually keeping people on income assistance instead of helping them move beyond it. Similarly, we made changes to the Student Financial Assistance program to better support residents, especially Indigenous students from small communities, by removing the semester limit on grants for Indigenous students, removing suspension penalties, and increasing the amounts available to all students. These examples show that real changes to how government operates and to the philosophy of government are achievable and possible.

Another example of breaking the mold is the creation of the unique tricameral governance structure of Aurora College. It was obvious to me that the traditional post-secondary government structure of a board of governors and an academic senate was not appropriate for the NWT. That is why Aurora College's governance system also includes an Indigenous knowledge-holders council. This council will not be a toothless advisory board but an integral component that will influence all aspects of college operations and decision-making. This structure is unique in Canada and, at best, rare in the rest of the world.

These examples represent my approach to governance. It is an approach that will continue to evolve because I continue to learn from every new experience and every new conversation. However, at the core is a philosophy that we are here to serve the interests of the people, not the interest of the government, and we must never waver from that. I hear lots of negative comments about the bureaucrats who control government.

Most of the public servants I know in my community, in your communities, in the headquarters offices, also want to do what's in the best interests of the people; however, they're often working in systems that are not designed in a way that allows them to do that. What I believe we need is direction from the Premier to ensure that the interests of the people, the interests of the residents and the businesses of the NWT, are front and center when proposing and developing legislation, writing policies, and designing programs. If we do not provide parameters in which to work, we can't be surprised when the outcomes are not what we want. We have an amazing workforce, and many of them are as frustrated as you. Let's give them what they need so they can work with us towards the vision of a thriving and prosperous NWT.

Earlier, I spoke about the importance and the necessity of working with Indigenous governments. As Minister, I did my best to do this. Early in the last government, I met with the Tlicho government to discuss the Chief Jimmy Bruneau School. The school was built by the Government of Canada in Edzo against the wishes of the Tlicho people who wanted the school in Rae. I, along with department officials, travelled to Edzo to present to the chiefs' executive council on the plans to renovate the existing school. At the beginning of the meeting, the chiefs made clear they would not support a retrofit of the existing school but instead wanted a new school built in Behchoko, closer to home, for the majority of students. Based on that meeting, I asked for and received Cabinet support to abandon the traditional GNWT approach to infrastructure and the Tlicho are now driving the process. This was a first for the GNWT.

That was followed by a similar, but again unique, approach in Colville Lake with the Behdji Ahda' First Nation.

The Education Act is another example of how we took steps in the last government to change how we work with Indigenous governments.

As you might be able to tell by now, I went into the last government wanting change. One of the biggest changes I was after was the

development of the new Education Act. We began with extensive engagements with the public, education bodies, and Indigenous governments, more engagement that would typically be done given the importance of this legislation. Very early it became obvious that a traditional approach to legislative development, even with enhanced engagement, was not appropriate for a piece of legislation that is so important and so impactful. I once again went to Cabinet and sought support to pursue a new approach. Until then, the only legislation codeveloped with Indigenous governments was related to lands and resources, and that's because it was required by the devolution agreements. Even then the parties involved had to be signatories to the agreement. Regardless, Cabinet supported the proposed approach of codeveloping the legislation through the NWT Council of Leaders, which is open to all Indigenous governments in the territory. Again, this is a first for the GNWT.

This is the direction that the GNWT is headed. It is the future of governance in the NWT, and we must embrace it and fully commit to it. However, we must take a deliberate and coordinated approach. There was no roadmap for these instances I've talked - about for the school projects, for the Education Act. I had to learn as I went, as did the GNWT and the Indigenous governments. If I am elected, I will ensure that the structures and mechanisms to facilitate collaboration with Indigenous governments are codeveloped and implemented so that we are able to continue down this path towards that vision of a thriving NWT where Indigenous governments and the GNWT work as equals.

Colleagues, there is much, much more that I could say, but I look forward to continued conversations with each of you over the next week and over the next four years. Regardless of what happens, I want to reaffirm my commitment to the people of the Northwest Territories and to each of you. I will continue to work hard to listen and to use this honour that I have been given by my constituents to do what I can to make our territory a better place for our residents, their children, and the generations to come. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Simpson. Members, I wish to draw your attention to the presence of the Honourable Paulie Chinna, Member of the 19th Legislative Assembly and current Minister, in the gallery.

Next, we have Mr. Testart. Mr. Testart, please proceed.

MR. KIERON TESTART'S SPEECH

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Honourable Members, citizens of the Northwest Territories, and Indigenous nations who have called these lands home since time immemorial. I stand before you here on Chief Drygeese territory, the sovereign homeland to the Yellowknives Dene, along with the Tlicho, Metis, and other First Peoples. The land on which this Assembly is built has been a meeting place of many cultures and peoples since before the recording of western history. It is in that spirit that I speak to you today as we begin the important process of choosing the next leader of the Northwest Territories in the traditions of our consensus government.

I am proud to be a part of this Assembly, proud of the deep collaboration we have seen together in such a short time, proud of the mutual respect we have for each other and for the First Peoples of these lands. I did not put pen to paper to consider this speech until I had first heard of the priorities of my colleagues and those of the leaders of the Indigenous nations. I feel very confident that this Assembly has found common cause to move forward, shoulder to shoulder, into a future beset with challenges but equally filled with opportunities and hope for a brighter tomorrow.

I am a proud Northerner. I am the son of Maureen and Terry. My mother was a teacher in small communities, helping empower Indigenous students, before she embarked on a career in public service as a constituency manager and later chief of staff for Ethyl Blondin-Andrew, the MP for the Western Arctic from 1988 to 2006, and the Minister of State and the Queen's Privy Council. My father was a public servant and, in fact, continues to be a public servant, now working in Fort McPherson where he serves as senior administrative officer. And I'm pleased to see him here today. It is from them that I learned the value of public service and through their example that I decided to dedicate my own career to serving others.

I have worked as a deputy sheriff, I have worked as a policy analyst for the GNWT, as an economic development director for the Yellowknives Dene, and I've had the profound honour of representing two of this House's 19 ridings. But most importantly, I am a husband to Colleen and a father to Corbin, Eve, and Leander. My family is what motivates me to step forward today to set a foundation for a future where my children, and all of our children, can enjoy the opportunities that I was afforded growing up in the Northwest Territories.

I have won elections, and I have lost elections. You learn a lot more from losing than winning.

You learn the importance of family, of patience, and of time. In this House, we can only count on four years, and our time is precious since our election only weeks ago. I know we need to make every moment of this 20th Assembly count, and I will not be idle as a leader no matter what side of the House I serve. There is too much at stake for my constituents, the ones I hold dear, and to all those who look to us with concern about their future. The clock is ticking, and we have much to do.

I respectfully ask you consider me worthy of the honour to serve you as Premier and allow me the privilege of your attention as I present my vision for how we can bring meaningful and positive change to our government.

I have and always will be committed to change. Not for the sake of it alone, but to foster good governance and effective results for our people. Our government in the past has spent too much time handwringing and contemplating risk rather than making meaningful decisions to tackle the most serious issues facing our community. We have seen this time and time again. Action plans instead of action, uncosted and unmeasured strategies, one size fits all policies that are developed in Yellowknife that are unworkable anywhere else. This needs to stop now. I have said it before that I do not believe in zero risk plans just as I do not believe in developing processes that serve as guardrails around decision-making of elected leaders. Ministers need to lead, not follow. And I am determined to empower our Cabinet to succeed, and I am just as determined to foster unity amongst all 19 Members of this House and make accountability and transparency an irrevocable part of how we do business.

Relationships are crucial to the work we do, but good relationships alone are not enough to change things. This doesn't mean we need a revolution as I once called for, instead we need an evolution of a system that has served the NWT so well over the years. Northerners are proud of this system of government. I understand that. And I want to ensure that we keep all those things that work so well and improve on the parts of the system that don't. We can do better but not if we rely on relationships alone to get results our people so desperately desire.

I believe it is time to innovate and further decolonize our system of government by breaking down the barriers between Cabinet and Regular Members. I propose to strengthen the standing committee system by making each committee chair an associate Minister. Associate Ministers will be given Executive Council status for their purposes of information sharing, allowed to access their Minister

counterparts' pre-session briefings, granted observer status in committees of Cabinet, meetings of the Intergovernmental Council and the Council of Leaders. Associate Ministers will not be part of Cabinet decision-making and not subject to Cabinet solidarity. This change will effectively preserve the balance of the Assembly, the balance of accountability in the Assembly, and enhance the functions of all MLAs working together while giving chairs of committees more resources to help guide the mandate to meaningful results while incorporating familiar chief and council leadership styles to the consensus system.

As for Cabinet itself, I will encourage active participation in the proceedings of the House where previous executive councils have chosen to abstain or consider the work of Regular Members to be little more than advice to government. We are all Members of this House, and we all will respect the work we do in this Assembly. Cabinet Ministers will be allowed to debate motions brought forward by Regular Members in standing committees, bring forward their own motions unrelated to their role as Minister, and they will not be subject to Cabinet solidarity except for public bills and appropriation bills.

I will also ensure Cabinet Ministers have the appropriate resources to effectively manage their portfolios without being overwhelmed by their many responsibilities. This means additional staffing to ensure effective direction is provided to the public service and likewise that communication is current, consistent, and clear with the public at large. The more support we give to our Ministers, the more progress we will see getting results for the mandate of the next government.

I envision a new range of portfolios that will address the priorities of this Assembly. This should be the norm setting ministries based on the will of the Members, and therefore the people they serve, rather than a comfort of the public service.

I will develop new portfolios for treaties, addictions, official languages, net zero, and red tape reduction that will be integrated into existing portfolios to refocus the priority of our departments and give the public and Indigenous nations clarity on what this new government stands for.

As for the Premier's office, I believe accountability and transparency are paramount and will suggest a fixed time Premier's question period to be held at least once a legislative sitting where the Premier does not transfer questions to other Ministers and responds

directly to the concerns of Members and their constituents.

We also need to simplify portfolios in departments by placing all immigration policies under one roof while we modernize and rethink our public service. This is a discussion that needs to be had with all MLAs as part of our priority setting process and with input from the public service, but I am more than prepared to change departments to better serve our citizens.

In this respect, I believe it's time to dissolve the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs and replace it with new departments of infrastructure and communities and public safety and emergency preparedness. We have outgrown the need for a centralized department like MACA where we need instead to empower regional and local governments directly while renewing our efforts to provide sound emergency management in the Northwest Territories through a dedicated department.

We also need to strengthen corporate functions of government with a new Executive Council office and NWT Treasury Board that coordinates GNWT policies across all departments and ensures an all-of-government approach to policy and service delivery. These empowered central agencies can play an essential oversight role into department spending and human resource policies giving real guidance on how departments operate and ensuring best value for money in all aspects of service delivery. Breaking down departmental silos through these new offices will be enhanced with the appointment of regional directors that report to the Premier bringing departments together in regions to ensure successful program delivery and liaising on the ground with local, regional, and Indigenous governments.

We will also indigenize policy development across all departments to ensure programs and services are regionally based and recognize the unique needs of each of our communities. Data driven analysis across all departments will ensure resources are delivered to where they need to go instead of a shotgun approach that leaves some residents underserved.

I also believe the role of Caucus must be expanded. We can do more working together as equals by leaving our roles at the door and reminding the public and each other that we are all Members of this House. I propose to continue the good work we've begun engaging with Indigenous nations by having annual leadership summits between Caucus and Indigenous leaders and codifying that into our standing conventions.

I also propose regular Caucus meetings that are longer and more thorough for information sharing and discussions with the governments legislative and fiscal agenda. These meetings will be meaningful and given enough time for input from all Members rather than brief affairs occurring before each legislative sitting.

We can all agree that partnerships are critical in building the future we all want to see for the Northwest Territories. Federal engagement is lagging behind, and millions have been left on the table. This must be resolved in time before the next federal election. We need to pool our collective strength as a confederation within confederation working with Indigenous nations to get more resources flowing into the North. I will adopt a Team NWT approach where the Premier will lead missions to Ottawa, provinces, and international destinations in concert with Indigenous leaders. I have personally known Prime Minister Trudeau for the past ten years and commit to sitting down with him and opening the door to new funding for our most pressing infrastructure and social needs. If elected, I will get the ball rolling on the first Team NWT mission within 72 hours and bring our leaders to Ottawa to deal with infrastructure, land claims negotiations, NIHB, Nutrition North, offshore oil and gas, and northern defense infrastructure.

The 19th Assembly made good progress on building a framework for meaningful partnerships with Indigenous nations on legislation and collaboration. These measures were good first steps but ultimately not protected by our constitution and therefore vulnerable to the changing whims of a public government. We need to bring co-drafting into the public government, so it's protected by the constitution of the NWT.

I commit to holding a constitutional convention in two years, if not sooner, to discuss the future of the NWT with representatives from Indigenous nations, the Government of Canada, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and civil society. This will allow us to discuss comprehensive changes to the NWT, devolve the remaining powers held by Ottawa, and bring legislative oversight to Indigenous nations over what the public government does as either upper House or an Indigenous senate. These are major decisions and deserve more thought and time to discuss exactly what will be afforded to our people as part of this process. And that time will be afforded to them as we look to the future, and I want all people to be a part of that conversation.

I respect the priorities of the honourable Members duly elected to represent all Northerners. And in that regard, I'm not going to

dictate my priorities as a prospective Premier of this House. Rather I told you about how I intend to govern. But I want to read, and I will reaffirm my commitment to the collaborative priority setting process we've all agreed to as part of the 20th Assembly and that will take us into the new year. But I promise today that that mandate that eventually comes from the government will be developed to meet those priorities with costed and measurable actions that have clear timelines for implementation. However, there are serious challenges ahead that must be addressed by the next Executive Council regardless of our priorities. I believe these are necessities for the future of the Northwest Territories that cannot be ignored.

For a start, let us consider the wildfire and flooding disasters in the past two years that displaced thousands from their homes and communities. Two-thirds of our people became climate refugees overnight. Sovereign Indigenous governments and local municipalities were shut out of emergency management operations and decisions. The public was told contradictory statements almost daily and when they needed clear communication from their elected leaders and government officials, Northerners were told to fend for themselves and bear the cost of evacuation after dutifully following orders in good faith. These are not imagined slights of a frustrated populous; these are real things that happened and must never happen again.

Some Members have spoken of a desire to bring forward a motion to call for an independent review. I support this. And further, I believe an independent commission must be struck by this Legislative Assembly with a mandate determined by the House and not the government. Under my leadership, if elected, the Cabinet will support a motion to establish an independent commission and direct the public service to cooperate fully with the process. Our people deserve transparency and accountability after such a traumatic episode in our history. We need truth and healing that can only come from understanding why and how decisions were made with recommendations on how we can move forward together.

Climate change is real and has forever altered the reliable networks of transportation and supply that we have come to rely on in the Mackenzie Valley. The Mackenzie Valley Highway is now an essential transportation corridor, no longer a priority to compete with other major capital projects. We must ensure our supply chain is intact and uninterrupted, and we need this critical piece of transportation infrastructure to ensure the safety and security of all of our communities. We simply cannot

afford not to do it, and we need to get it done fast.

We feel the pain of our people from an addictions epidemic that has swept through all of our communities and devastated families. We have allowed excuses to persist instead of challenging our governments to find a way to create local treatment centres and programs that allow our citizens to heal. Like critical supply chains that are essential to the good governance of our territories, treatment centres are no longer an optional priority, and a plan must be put in place to develop regional treatment centres across our communities. This cannot be done by this government alone, and as Premier I will direct the establishment of a treatment centre working group that brings together Indigenous governments, municipalities, and civil society to identify barriers to success, jointly apply for funding, and develop culturally relevant terms of reference for each program and facility.

Our local governments have been underfunded and overlooked for too long. The municipal funding gap is a travesty of public administration and is unacceptable. Closing the gap is not a matter of priorities. It is a moral obligation to peace, order, and good government. I commit that the first operational maintenance budget will find the money to fund our communities or change the formula to make it workable within the means of our fiscal framework. But I cannot allow the hypocrisy of a government that refuses to follow its own funding policies to continue. We cannot continue to call out Ottawa for underfunding the territories if our own government is doing the exact same thing at home.

Carbon pricing isn't working in the NWT. We are one of only three jurisdictions in Canada with our own carbon taxation system, and it is costly and difficult to administer as we had to play catchup to the decisions that are made in Ottawa, like exempting home heating fuel that Northerners are not able now to benefit from. We should not be duplicating processes unnecessarily. I will move to scrap the NWT carbon tax and replace it with the federal system to improve efficiency and lower administrative costs, and I will also direct the Department of Finance to create a grant rebate program to offset extra costs for heating oil until the federal exemptions kick in. I will also work with Ottawa to develop further exemptions to ensure Northerners are not paying for pollution when they cannot afford low carbon alternatives in their own communities.

Reconciliation is not just historic; it is a living process and we owe a duty to engage -- that we owe a duty to engage with every day. For

governments, that is even more important and we have to address some of the recent actions in previous governments that have set back relations with Indigenous nations. After Quebec appealed Bill C-92, an act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Metis children, youth, and families in 2022, the GNWT joined Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba in their interventions supporting that province's perspective. Specific to the NWT's position is the fact that C-92 instigated by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation to pass its own law called the Family Way of Life to codify jurisdiction of children and youth in accordance with the federal act. Despite initially supporting both C-92 and the IRC's moves, the GNWT has moved to undermine the IRC despite the Inuvialuit Final Agreement having the right to supercede territorial law whenever there's a conflict. This is unacceptable and a clear violation of the Indigenous sovereignty and treaties that we are all sworn to uphold.

Last year, the Lutselk'e Dene First Nation was subject to an unlawful raid by GNWT officials at the Timber Bay cultural site. Elders, women, and children were torn from their tents by force invoking a legacy of intergenerational trauma and colonialism that has profoundly impacted these Dene people. I have -- as I indicated, this raid was deemed unlawful by the courts and no charges have been laid. It is time to right these wrongs. We need a clean slate and a fresh start with Indigenous nations if we are to move together into a harmonious collaborative future. As Premier, I will direct the GNWT to withdraw from Bill C-92 -- the bill C-92 intervention and issue a formal apology to both the IRC and the Lutselk'e Dene First Nation and further direct that fair compensation be provided to the people of Lutselk'e for their suffering.

Land is life to the people of the Northwest Territories. Without certainty over land and resources, we cannot build a strong foundation for success. And it is time to make progress on the outstanding land claims and self-government agreements. We need a new approach to negotiations; not a single land or self-government agreement was accomplished in the last Assembly. We can do better. I am calling on new negotiation mandates within one year of swearing in the next Cabinet and new offers at all tables within two years. It is my earnest hope that by the end of this Assembly, we'll be discussing implementing these agreements for the 21st Assembly rather than continuing to talk about negotiating them.

Mr. Clerk, I want to thank the honourable Members for their consideration of my nomination to this important role. This decision is not just a choice of who gets to be the next Premier; it is a choice on how the next Cabinet

will work both with its own Members and with the Regular Members. When Members consider this choice, remember that after three elections that have seen record levels of turnover of the membership of this honourable House, our constituents have set the bar very high for meaningful change in how we do business as a government. I am determined to meet those high expectations and ensure that as we do, no Member is left behind and that we are all united in our desire for a renewed government that gets results for our people. Thank you

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Testart.

Members, I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of grand Chief Jackson Lafferty, former Member, Minister, and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Next we will hear from Mr. Thompson, the Member for Nahendeh. Mr. Thompson, the floor is yours.

MR. SHANE THOMPSON'S SPEECH

MR. THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. First, I want to begin my remarks today with acknowledgement that today's proceedings are taking place on Chief Drygeese territory, the traditional home of YK Dene First Nation, also the traditional lands of North Slave Metis and Tlicho.

For those of us who are new to the Assembly, and for the members of the public who are listening in, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Shane Thompson. It is an honour today to put my name forward for consideration for Premier in the Northwest Territories. I've been returned by the voters of the Nahendeh for a third term as their Member. I'm deeply grateful to the people of Fort Simpson, Jean Marie River, Sambaa K'e Wrigley, Fort Liard, and Nahanni Butte for their strong support in putting their faith in me for a third time.

I am the son of Mary and Gord Thompson of Hay River, and the partner of Grace, proud father of seven children, two stepchildren, and ten grandchildren. I was born and raised in Hay River and spent five years as the recreation coordinator for the hamlet of Kugluktuk and 23 years for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs as a senior recreation development coordinator in Fort Simpson, and eight years as the MLA for Nahendeh.

After this term, I will have spent 40 years of my life in the service of residents in the Northwest

Territories. This is a great honour that I hold dearly to my heart.

In addition to living in Hay River, I lived in Inuvik, Kugluktuk, and Fort Simpson, which has given me the chance to experience life in other NWT and northern communities. Some of these communities would be considered small, isolated, regional in nature. I've also been fortunate enough to travel to all 33 communities in the NWT throughout my career. Spending my life living and working in the Northwest Territories has given me the opportunity to familiarize myself with our communities, getting to know the people, and hearing their challenges and successes. This has helped me to understand what is important to NWT residents.

After being elected to the 19th Assembly, my colleagues gave me the honour to be elected to Cabinet, and the Premier had trusted me in faith in holding several portfolios throughout these four years. I also was always willing to take on additional responsibilities when asked throughout these four years. Besides holding the portfolios of Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Department of Lands, now known as the Department of Environment and Climate Change for the four years, I also served as Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, the Minister Responsible for Youth for two and a half years. I also held five additional portfolios for short periods of time ranging from two months to a year and a half.

In addition to those portfolios, I was a chair of the child and family committee of Cabinet and was part of the energy and climate change committee of Cabinet in environment and economic diversification growth and environment, reconciliation Indigenous affairs, priorities and planning, and alternate to the Board of Management. I also served as Cabinet's representatives of goals and procedures committee.

As you can imagine, I had a very busy four years. Besides contributing to the whole-of-government response to COVID, I was the lead Minister that dealt with a variety of issues such as caribou, climate change, transboundary agreements, municipal funding shortfalls, floods, fires, evacuations and their recoveries, important work on legislation such as the Forestry Act, just to name a few.

In the 18th Assembly, I served as the chair for the Standing Committee on Social Development for the full term. This committee was responsible for providing oversight for the Departments of Health and Social Services; Education, Culture and Employment; Housing,

and Justice; departments that count for approximately 60 percent of the government budget. I also served on the rules and procedures committee.

Besides these roles, I was the MLA for six communities and addressed over 1,850 constituent issues during two full terms. This past eight years has been a lot of work but very rewarding.

I have always respected peoples' right to be heard and criticize government's policies and decisions and have come to understand this is part of the job and one that I do not shy away from. I firmly believe you're not going to please everyone with your decisions; however, you need to own your decisions based on sound advice after questioning it. You need to admit your mistakes when you make them and be prepared to hear criticism after you make the decisions or decision.

During the past year, people started reaching out to me and asking what my future was going to be and if it included looking at the Premiership. I explained that we were still dealing with several challenges and important work that was where my focus was going to be. As the election grew closer, the same question came about but I told them I was focused on the people in Nahendeh and the election. Now that I'm reelected, I started reaching out to various Indigenous leaders throughout the NWT and my region to ask for their input on how we, as the 20th Assembly, can improve our relationships with them. I can say I have had several very positive conversations, and I've heard some good advice and ideas on what needs to be done moving forward to strengthen and nurture us and improve how we work together.

In the previous two days, the 19 of us have had the opportunity to meet with a number of Indigenous governments to hear their ideas on how we move forward. This was very similar to my telephone conversations. As I said during the wrap-up yesterday, we need to set short, medium, long-term goals for the next four years and continue to meet annually with our Indigenous and community government partners.

The next step was to reach out to my elders advisory group from the Nahendeh riding to ask their advice and support on what I should be doing moving forward. They explained that I need to put my name forward because we need a person in this position who has lived in various parts of the NWT, including small and isolated communities. They explained that I was not afraid of hard work and, more importantly, I was approachable and willing to

listen and try to resolve residents' concerns. They stressed it was time for a voice from outside of Yellowknife but, more importantly, a voice that has experience working and living in small communities. I've had that very unique experience and willing to challenge the system for the betterment of all communities.

As Premier, I will continue to commit ensuring that departments are prepared, empowered to work collaboratively to the greatest possible degree with the appropriate standing committees and Members. This includes seeking more extensive committee input on proposed legislation initiatives at the earliest possible opportunity.

As well, to improve working relationships, I will propose that the Cabinet meet twice a year to see how we are doing and how we can improve. As I firmly believe, and said throughout my life, you do not need to agree with one another however you need to respect and work together if you want to have achieved success.

I am committed to reaching out to each Member individually, especially when work being done has potential impact on your constituents. I will work actively to seek your initiative, invitation, and find opportunities to travel your communities to better understand your concerns and those of your constituents. This is how I did my job as an MLA and a Minister for the past eight years, and I will continue to do that as Premier.

It is about hearing from different voices directly. I commit to meeting and regularly reaching out to you and standing committee, not only to inform committee of ongoing departmental work but to seek your guidance, thoughts, and input before making key decisions on policies, programs, and legislative initiatives. I know that we may not be able to always reach agreement on these issues but I pledge to you to ensure that the views of the standing committee will be sought, heard, and carefully considered before important decisions are made. I will do my best to explain the decisions I make and the direction I have given so that during those times when your requests have not been fully met, you understand the rationale that shapes the final decision. Your opinion on sincerely and responsibility I communicate with you will be measured for the success in these areas.

As being the third person to speak, I would like to thank the two previous candidates for their speeches, and I look forward to hearing the final candidate. I can say that I've had some very good conversations with the other candidates and some of their ideas are similar to mine so I decided not to repeat them but to focus on some of the things I want to achieve.

Saying that, Mr. Speaker, we're going to move into some very challenging times but the opportunity for success is there. I'd like now to list some items here that I would like to achieve as Premier in the 20th Assembly. These are items I believe will support the new mandate that we are collectively agreeing to.

Government renewal and restructuring

With programs identified, government renewal projects need to be finished in the first 15 months of this government to help us in our budgeting process. There's a large number, or a huge number of unappointed positions within the departments, and we need to see if these positions are needed. If they are, then they need to be added to the budget. If not, they need to be removed.

The Department of Health and Social Services.

With over a \$240 million deficit, I would propose realigning the Department of Health and Social Services and the NWT Health and Social Services Authority. We would look at HSS and NWTSSA and develop a department of health which would include health services, medical travel, medivacs, and the creation of a new department of social services that would see realignment of services including child and family workers, adoption, foster care, income support, and other social programs like fuel subsidy. The common denominator of this new department would be a focus on antipoverty and by combining the support that addresses poverty, we will help ensure families have better access to supports necessary to help them and their families prosper.

Emergency and wildlife management.

After an afteraction review of this year's historical fire season and community evacuations need to be extensive and involving public and all partners. The GNWT needs an updated NWT emergency plan that enhances GNWT and community government training and increased capacity for emergency response and evacuations across all NWT communities.

Wildfire management

A combination of firebreaks and prescribed burns around communities needed to be done. This can be done by working with private business to cut large trees for timber and working with individuals to cut small trees for firewood. We would work with communities to do prescribed burns to build safe or to build even larger firebreaks to protect our communities. We also need to bring fire crews and aircrafts on earlier in the season and keep

them longer. Fire seasons start earlier and last longer every year. Additionally, overwintering fires represent an increased threat to our communities that need to be attacked first thing in the spring. We need to resource our firefighters out appropriately to address the increased risk for wildfires that we now see.

Intergovernmental legislation in the development process

The Government of the Northwest Territories needs to continue to advance land and natural resource legislation initiatives through the implementation of the Intergovernmental Council legislation development protocol. This needs to continue with improvements which will help us build further trust. It is important that we continue to collaborate with Indigenous governments and organizations and other partners on land and natural resource legislation and consider expanding legislation development process to other areas of the government.

Federal government advocacy

We need to focus our advocacy work with the federal government to be strategic and increase the likelihood of success. I would like to focus the GNWT's efforts on federal advocacy on the following projects:

Project finance for permanence. The project finance for permanence could bring hundreds of millions of dollars of long-term investments to the territories for Indigenous governments and communities. This initiative would support healthy culture, economy, communities moving forward, and the GNWT's healthy land healthy peoples' conservation work with a plan with providing sustainable economy and community development in the territories.

Designated authorities

There are nine designated authorities in the NWT. All designated 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 increased federal funding and land.

Clean and reliable energy

We need to continue advocating to the federal government for funding that supports an expanded hydro network. A hydro network would reduce our reliance on diesel power generation while reducing costs for residents, business, and government.

Mackenzie Valley Highway and other road infrastructure

We need to prioritize the work of the Mackenzie Valley Highway and work with the federal government to expand it all the way to Tsiigehtchic. There are many factors that are making this the perfect project to help Canada's sovereignty in the communities thanks to all-season road access, but it could also bring economic diversification, increase tourism, small business, and the potential for further development and expansion of natural resources in the region. We also need to do work for the communities that don't have roads, and we need to get them so that they have the ability to access affordable living.

Housing

Like in Nunavut, we need to develop a strategy that would see an increase in housing units in the NWT. The opportunity is there to work with the federal government to get funds into the NWT to get more housing units. As well, we need to be supportive of Indigenous governments on the request to the federal government. And this was what the 19th Assembly did.

Mental health, addictions, treatment centres, and aftercare

This is very much a huge crisis across the Northwest Territories. We have all heard during the campaign, and previously, we need to improve this area for our residents. I think we need to develop our own process support for residents. We need to utilize our resources such as the Dene wellness counsellors, elders, individuals that have turned their life around. We need to look at utilizing on the land programs that already exist and how to enhance them to support our residents.

Elders

Finally, I believe we must do more as a government to support our elders. As I have said in this House before, I would like to see the GNWT legislate a senior advocate who would work to ensure that the needs of the members of the vulnerable demographics are being met. Remember, this was our foundation and that's why we are here.

My promise

While these issues are important to me as a political leader, I will work equally as hard to fulfill the directions set by this Assembly and our priorities for the benefit of the NWT. As a Member of this Assembly, every single one of you was selected by your constituents to represent their concerns. I deeply respect the

responsibility that has been placed upon you to be the voice of the people you represent. I will also work to support and guide our Cabinet colleagues and ask them that they also prioritize their relationship with all Members of the Legislative Assembly. I will also make it clear of my expectations that all Cabinet Members work collaboratively with legislative committees and Indigenous governments.

The NWT is an incredible, rich territory with many political voices. Only by working together can we reach the full potential of the 20th Assembly. If you put your trust in me to serve as Premier, then I will make sure I will make you this pledge: Going forward, I vow to always keep this respect in the forefront of my mind to serve as a constant reminder that being the Premier does not make anybody more important than any Member in this House. It just added new responsibilities to the role. I also pledge to the people in Nahendeh that I will continue to be available to my constituents to help address and resolve your issues. I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to all you today. And thank you for your support. Mahsi cho. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Thompson. Our next final speech will be from Ms. Wawzonek, the Member for Yellowknife South. Ms. Wawzonek, you have the floor.

MS. CAROLINE WAWZONEK'S SPEECH

MS. WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Chair, colleagues. I'd like to start by introducing myself more personally to those who may not know me very well yet. I am very grateful to have been welcomed as a newcomer to Chief Drygeese territory, home of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, and lands now shared with other Dene, Metis, and Inuit peoples. Some of you may know my story already, as I have told it many times, but for those who do not, my parents, Ed and Bev, adopted me at 14 days old in Calgary. That's where I was born. Both of their parents immigrated from eastern Europe in order to try and provide their families with a better future. My parents did not have the opportunity to go to university, but they worked very hard to make sure that I would. I graduated from the University of Calgary first and then a law degree from the University of Toronto thereafter.

I met my birth parents in my early 20s. My birth mother Shelly is from central northern Alberta as is my birth father Steven. And one of the first things that his family sent me after we connected was our family tree, showing and explaining to me their membership in the Metis Nation of Alberta tracing our ancestral roots to

the Red River Nation and ultimately an uncle many times once removed of Mr. Louis Riel.

My grandmother has asked me whether I've completed yet the paperwork that they sent me, more than once, for myself and my children to join as members. Being not a resident of Alberta, I cannot join the Metis Nation of Alberta and without a land connection in the Northwest Territories, I cannot join the Metis nation here.

Different people have different adoption experiences. I do want to be clear. I don't identify as Indigenous. I am deeply proud of my ancestry and my family's history, and I have openly told my story for a long time but I was not raised in a Metis culture and particularly given the public role that I've occupied for some time, I'm sensitive to not take space from those who have direct connections to an Indigenous language, culture, or lived experience.

I am deeply grateful to live in a place where my children have the opportunity to experience Indigenous cultures alive around them every day.

I want to speak a bit this morning to why I'm running, what I think I can bring to this position, and end with some comments about consensus government. And on that, I'll start where I left off on Monday, which is about vision.

In my observation, the Government of the Northwest Territories struggles to articulate vision. It is frustrating to residents. It is frustrating to the public service. It is frustrating to prospective investors. Who are we and what do we want to do?

Individual departments certainly produce action plans and strategies, we put forward our list of priorities, but historically it's difficult to bring this down to a cohesive vision. And one of the reasons I've decided to put my name forward as Premier is because I want us to help articulate a vision. And to be clear, it is not my vision.

Any vision for the Government of the Northwest Territories should not be the vision of the Premier's office. It must be the vision of the government. It must flow from this Assembly. But there are some functional responsibilities in the office. One is that the Premier, in my view, is responsible to put forward a sense of vision of who we are to the rest of Canada and on the world stage.

Now, just as the horizon is always changing, in my view our vision towards that future horizon should also be capable of change but we do need to at least be looking at the horizon. And so to pick up where I started on Monday, I would suggest the Northwest Territories is a

trailblazer in Indigenous reconciliation and consensus-style government. We should be known as a place of opportunity, a place of history, of culture, of somewhere that is ready to innovate, and we have healthy people, educated people, who are ready to maximize on all of these opportunities.

And so why am I running?

Besides wanting to see more vision, I also would like to see our political vision more easily and more frequently translated into government action. The reputation of an inability to translate government into practical and timely change must end. The Assembly voices our political priorities, and the Premier's office ought to be translating and driving that vision into the government alongside every Ministers' office into their departments. So why do we struggle to sometimes get things done?

Vision is one part of it. There's also information sharing. We can do a much better job of sharing information with Indigenous governments, with the committee MLAs, with the public. That will help build trust in our processes. We need not be afraid of sharing information even in a 24-hour news cycle. It doesn't give a lot of room for error. But in my experience if you make a mistake and you own it, people will look past it.

Our regional authorities need more accountability to make decisions. We talked about this in the last Assembly, but it is a lot more challenging than it sounds. We hear the criticism that the bureaucracy is running everything. So then how much authority do you give to a bureaucrat to make a decision in the face of that criticism?

Again, I do think it is possible to find a balance. I think, quite practically, you create matrices so that there's an understanding and when there's conflicts that exist in the decision-making process, you create guidelines so it's clear what the parameters of the decision are; you set timelines and make sure they're public so that people know within what kind of timeframe your decision-makers are supposed to be making their decisions; and you allow for appeal mechanisms so that when something does go wrong it can go back up the chain.

Importantly, though, translating political ideas into operational realities does take leadership. I want to give you a couple of examples.

When I started four years ago, incremental budgeting approach was not intuitive to me. Why do we assume every year that one department should get the same funding as they had every year before? Is that the best amount of funding? Is it working? Are they delivering what they need to deliver?

Evidence-based decision-making was still a bit of a buzzword at the time. I think it's one we should bring back.

Cutting things out for the sake of cutting is pointless. It's been tried. Sometimes people just didn't cut it and then you'd forget about it, or other times they'd cut something easy like policy functions or communications functions rather than a frontline service only to have that catch up with you later. And so out of my questions about efficiencies and where can we actually be better spending all of our budget came the government renewal process. It was a problem that I identified. Public service came up with a solution. It came up to Cabinet for much discussion but it's been instituted.

Imagine that four years ago the Government of the Northwest Territories did not know all the programs and services it offered. I find that quite striking. But we do now.

Imagine that four years ago we did not have a program evaluation policy. This is not the kind of sexy announceable that one goes and takes a picture with, but I find it to be quite fundamental to the functioning of good government.

So the vision I was acting on was one of efficiency. I asked why things were the way they were, and the public services produced me a response, and believe me I do certainly tweak the decision papers before I sign them, but the idea was that we were able to take a political will and turn it into action.

I had much the same experience with the capital budget. Why do we allow ballooning budgets when we know that our capacity rests so much lower? Well, again, now we cap it. We have slower debt growth. We have room under the borrowing limit. Quite frankly, it came not a moment too soon given what happened with the wildfire season.

And so what type of qualities do I suggest that I might bring? If you want to get to know me and my style, what I believe in and my values as a professional, then I would suggest that you read the objectives for change that are in the Government of the Northwest Territories' action plan in response to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls titled Changing the Relationship. If you want to go further back, you could read the submissions that I made on behalf of the Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories to the national inquiry. They are strikingly similar.

These values are that you acknowledge. You face a problem at hand honestly.

Second, you establish, build, and foster trust. Trust takes time. It takes communication, humility, and it takes a sense of demonstrating that when you say you're going to do something, you do your very best to do it. And if you can't, you explain why.

Be person centered. As an elected public servant, never forget who you serve.

And last, accountability. That you monitor and evaluate ongoing efforts to affect change. Change is not easy, a path may not be obvious, but it will come from being methodical in your approach, diligent in your monitoring. Pay attention, follow up, find the barriers to success and break them down.

Again, that sounds easy. It's not. But I want to give a few examples where we have seen some success and some movement.

In terms of acknowledging, I have acknowledged that the public service was not representative of the population that it serves.

Imagine this: Four years ago there was no strategic human resources plan. There was no meaningful succession planning. There was no Indigenous recruitment and retention framework. No means of reviewing the JDs, the job evaluations that so many of us complain about. No training or education plans and no incentivization at senior leadership for performance indicators to make sure that we are actually employing all these tools now. It's going to take a culture shift to achieve all of these things but it started from the acknowledgement, and a true acknowledgement of the problem.

One crisis I would like to acknowledge, and I think we are all going to have to face in the next four years, I want to acknowledge the addictions crisis that is gripping our communities. We have been hearing about it all week. Many of us have been hearing about it through the campaign. We need to acknowledge it. It needs to start from the top.

On building trust, as I said trust does take time. It takes dialogue. It takes relationships. A few small examples, because sometimes they start small, I did start the budget dialogue process as a way in order to engage with outside of government, not only about what we're doing but about the things that people say we are not doing. It's often a difficult conversation. But some good things did grow from it, such as having forced growth for contribution agreements, which is an idea that certainly grew from there and from the conversations that I had.

Having town hall meetings with public servants. Again, it seems simple. But it was incredible what an important direct connection it gave to myself and deputies to have back to our frontline staff.

I think we can do more here.

- I think we can have better culture change in the public service.
- Perhaps a whistleblower style process for excluded employees, because right now they don't have one.
- A clear series of outcomes when there's been a finding of misconduct in the workplace, because right now it's not clear what happens next.
- Clear travel plans and expectations so that Ministers and deputies are in every community.
- Regional directors in every community who report in not only to deputies but also to Ministers who need to hear what's happening in every region.

And we are seriously in need of trust in our relationships with Indigenous governments. Of course we should be going to Ottawa together. This seems obvious to me, and it seems simple, but it is not happening.

I am proud of some of the progress we've made in the last four years: Council of Leaders, the Intergovernmental Legislative Protocol, and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous people. But it is time to move forward with that foundation and be true partners. This will achieve more for every person, every resident, and every community in the Northwest Territories.

And the last of the values I wanted to speak to was accountability. We need stronger single point accountability for whole-of-government solutions. That rests, in my view, in the Premier's office.

There are simple things that I think can make a difference to ensure better accountability for deliverables. I have been thinking about how the longer timeframe that we're proposing for our priorities might impact on mandate letters, and it occurred to me that perhaps this is an opportunity for mandate letters not to stagnate. Perhaps the mandate letters should be more like our business plans, where every Ministers' office becomes accountable year over year throughout the process. Our key fundamentals don't change but it means that as things are accomplished, we can add to it and they could

be more flexible. And we should be meeting on them regularly. Deputies, Ministers, Premier's office, should be all meeting on them regularly so that we are all working together, never just for the sake of meetings. Believe me, we don't need more of them. But if there is a barrier to achieving something, we must identify it early.

Often the barrier is outside of one's department, it may be at another level of government, and therein can be a role for the Premier's office to help break that down.

A small wish list item for me, I would like to take the red tape working group into the Premier's office. I was quite pleased to receive the Golden Scissors Award for creating the red tape working group. But, and it's a big "but", there's a lot more that could come from this.

There's been a number of things brought forward and identified but not all of the barriers have been broken down. Indeed, it strikes me when I have read in the reports essentially the words of well, Minister, it's hard to change these things. It infuriates MLAs. It infuriates the public. Public servants don't want to have to give that answer. We must find a way to break those barriers down.

I saw that, too, when I initially was responsible for the ICM -- the delivery of ICM here in the Government of the Northwest Territories, where, again, we would find the barriers between different departments but be unable to change the processes. Somewhere, eventually, in government that authority must rest and surely it would rest in the Premier's office.

An example of why this is important to the whole-of-government problems that we still see is within procurement. When we instituted the procurement review from the last government, there were multiple departments involved - Infrastructure, ITI, Housing, Finance. I was struck by the fact that there was multiple versions of objectives and principles for procurement existing across government. Imagine. And how are we supposed to actually act as a unit?

And after the independent review and a working group of all of the departments, each one wanting to make change, it was clear that each was waiting on the other to do something and yet nothing was getting done. Months were passing, and there was no response.

I did bring them together having made it clear, and having had it made clear, rather, that I would be the lead. I brought all the departments together with senior levels and the public servants were more than eager to have a sense of clear direction. With clear direction and a work plan and a timeline, we settled on

principles, produced a response, and have instituted significant change. We are now actually monitoring the promises that are made for northern contracting.

Accountability also means being present. I have not talked about specific priorities for this Assembly. I believe the priorities are a matter of collective discussion, and we are only partway through that process. But there is one exception. The Premier's office is the lead for executive and Indigenous affairs which is, in turn, the lead for land and self-government negotiations. In my view, there must be political leadership engaged in land and self-government negotiations and in the implementation of the existing agreements. I have a healthy appreciation for the distinction between the politics and governance and operations, but negotiations have political elements to them and negotiation mandates need to be responsive and reflective of political priorities. It is very clear that every Indigenous government is unique, the kind of political arrangements and agreements they are seeking are unique, and there are three parties at these tables. But one thing I do not want to see at the end of our four years is for the Government of the Northwest Territories to ever be described as the barrier holding up any agreement.

I will close with some comments on consensus government.

Before moving forward with my intention to put my name forward for Premier, I have made an effort to get to know each of you and to contact some of the Indigenous government leaders who I have had the chance to come to know over the last four years. My goal was to be aware whether or not another Yellowknife-based Premier would cause too great a rift. Had that been so, I would not have put my name forward.

I am conscious of the rift that exists already between Yellowknife and small communities. I certainly don't want it to get worse. I hope that we can find a way to move forward and make it better. Because politics in the Northwest Territories is founded on consensus and that, in turn, requires relationships, discussion, trust, and respect.

One of the things that has been one of my single biggest challenges, and the thing I am the most proud of, in the last four years, is that I was responsible for negotiating all eight budgets of the 19th Assembly for operational and for capital. And I am proud to say that with the support of my colleagues on Cabinet, we did not have to go out and seek out the three friends' approach. I did much work to find

pathways for individual Members to see some of their priorities and wishes reflected in the budgets during the course of negotiations. That sometimes came through increases to programs or funds that would then be relevant to what they were looking for, such as the Indigenous patient advocates. And at other times, I worked with my colleagues who could then, from their own departments, go and speak with the other Members and try to find ways to work with those departments directly on the projects that mattered to them. It did not mean that we had to pick items from a wish list. We found a way to amend our proposed estimates in a way that reflected our shared priorities as an Assembly.

There was a lot of back-and-forth discussions. There was some very long and tense discussions. People did not always leave happy from those discussions. But there was an interesting evolution of the process from the very first time we started back in 2020 to the last capital budget of 2024-2025.

I found that at the beginning there was a very formal sort of letter negotiation and letter exchange that took place. The correspondence had to flow entirely through the clerk's office, and there was little direct discussion. However, by the end I found that I appeared more and more frequently in front of committee. It became expected that I would appear, in fact, in front of committee and that we would engage in a dialogue as a group.

All of us on Cabinet became comfortable with this. There was never any question as to whether we would be needing three because we knew that the process, although more fraught and more lengthy, would yield fruit. And it did. And I am very honoured for the work we did.

Colleagues, we have a lot of bench strength in this room. I am very honoured to have the opportunity to serve with all of you. I am sincerely pleased, and I hope that if I am back in Cabinet, that I will -- in whatever capacity, that I will have the opportunity to rely on you as committee MLAs. Because quite simply, we cannot get the work in the GNWT done without strong leaders amongst MLAs. I saw that firsthand. Budgets would not have passed through the consensus government process I just described without leadership amongst MLAs, particularly the chair and deputy chair of the OC.

I do hope I have the opportunity to support my colleagues as Ministers in a Cabinet. It would be our Cabinet. It would not be my Cabinet. I promise I would not forget that. Cabinet and the Premiership still belongs to this Assembly. I

would hope that we can all show the public as leaders that we can focus on our priorities, unite in our effort as government, and do so in a way that respects all of our collective responsibilities to rebuild trust in this institution and create momentum towards positive change. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Ms. Wawzonek.

The candidates have completed their speeches for Premier. The Territorial Leadership Committee will now adjourn and reconvene at 9:00am on Thursday, December 7th, 2023.

Just a reminder for Members that the orientation program does continue this afternoon in the Eagle Room at 1 p.m. And for those who are travelling home tomorrow, I wish you safe travels. We stand adjourned.

---ADJOURNMENT

