

Responses to NNSL
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Wildlife – The duration, process and outcomes of a review of the Wildlife Act that began a decade ago after the completion of 54 drafts demonstrates the weaknesses in our current legislative consultative processes. Sometimes it is better to set priorities and amend legislation to deal with emerging crisis situations rather than working to develop omnibus legislation. The collapse of the Bathurst Barren Land Caribou herd occurred while legislators were debating the basis for managing caribou populations.

I believe the consultative processes for dealing with legislative change must be open and transparent to allow stakeholders to make their views known. Ultimately, however legislators must act in the best interests of their constituents and the population of the NWT. Not all decisions made by legislators will have universal acceptance. As legislators we need to be able to set clear parameters for consultations and provide for open access to interveners. But ultimately we must fulfill our obligations to act in the best interests for all of society.

Education – Providing accessible and quality education for all is one of the fundamental principles of western democracies. Parents, students, community leaders and Legislators all share a responsibility to ensure that classroom curriculum is relevant and appropriate, and that our schools are dedicated to positive outcomes. Absenteeism, drop outs, high failure rates, sub-standard scores on national achievement test all indicate that there is a problem with our current system. We need to understand the root of the problem.

Aurora College has performed well in advancing teacher education, preparing nurses, and in our renewable resource program. But there are still serious gaps. Aurora College needs to work with industry and government to identify gaps, build alliances with suitable institutions across Canada and in the circumpolar countries.

As an MLA I would press the legislature to undertake a complete and timely review of the government's investment in technical and trades programs taking into account current and future industry needs. Once we are sure that we have the right programs and that they are effective in achieving the desired outcomes I would push for an expansion in the Government's support for training positions that lead to certification. We also need to examine community based pre-qualification programs to qualify more people for careers in technology and the trades.

As part of this review we need to develop the appropriate metrics to measure our successes so that we can identify and correct problems that prevent successful training outcomes.

For promoting careers in the trades outside of regional centres I think that the priority should be given to working with organizations like "Skills Canada".

Resource Regulations - One of the more important issues raised in the federal governments, 2007 Neil McCrank report "Road to Improvement" on the regulatory environment in the NWT is the need to build a plan for the use of mineral resources. The government of the NWT has invested heavily in gathering and making available geoscience information to the resource industry. The NWT Geoscience Centre's resource maps provide the opportunity to create an overlay that maps out the industrial infrastructure investments needed to attract and sustain industry.

I believe uncertainty in regard to regulatory outcomes is as much of a deterrent to investment that the time taken to go through the regulatory process and explains why Nunavut and the Yukon are seen as more attractive place to invest than the NWT. Our Government needs to take a stance on those developments that it supports and those it doesn't. Streamlining the process to be both respectively of all environmental regulations and industry requirements should be a priority. Our Government needs to be solutions and models of how the process should work forward to the Federal Government to implement. If we continue to take a backseat to reform we may not like the system we end up with.

I believe we can improve certainty by having a clear vision and priorities for industrial development expressed through policies and legislation that streamline the permitting process to facilitate the development of priority resource development projects; that establish development zones; and frameworks for negotiating industrial benefit agreements.

Part of the framework for industrial development must include negotiations with the federal government to raise the debt ceiling by removing borrowing constraints on capital investments that are bank financed. Banks will do the due diligence to ensure that the revenue streams are in place to guarantee payback. This would allow government to partnering with industry in building sustaining industrial infrastructure. If the NWT were able to partner with industry in a meaningful way and build infrastructure that is paid for over time by the industry that needs it there would be significant public benefit to the development. Projects financed this way should be considered differently than our other debt.

Resource development in the past brought us many important pieces of public infrastructure that are still in use today and we need to make sure that future developments also leave behind infrastructure that we need.

Crime rates – A big part of dealing with crime rates in the NWT has to be preventing the crimes before that start. A focus on crime prevention that starts with education, promoting healthy lifestyles, ensuring our youth stay in school and have appropriate recreation options would help many stay on the right side of the law.

Treatment options for drug and alcohol addictions need to be easily available to the public and those currently in jail. Appropriate treatment options that are designed to assist as many individuals as possible would work in our favour. The GNWT needs to

continue working with communities and further researching the best tools that can be given to local governments to control local problems. While crime is often a local issue it is one that needs broad support. There is no single solution to keeping crime rates down but there must be a number of pillars to any strategy.

Across the territory in communities of all sizes community leaders, both those in and out of government, need to lead by example and work with those most in need. Education of all people – not just youths in school – on crimes needs to continue. Programs like Family Violence Awareness Week or the White Ribbon Campaign which is an effort led by men to end violence against women need to be supported and encouraged.

Housing – The GNWT ought to work with communities to assist in planning efforts and optimizing their investments in infrastructure. Optimizing municipal infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer lines, increased density should be a priority for the NWT. Legislatively ensuring that rigorous guidelines for housing are in place would set a higher standard across the territory. Many other jurisdictions have legislated significant new home warranties to guarantee buyers that they are covered for any problems during construction.

Work needs to be done with developers to determine the most appropriate incentives to encourage the development of higher density housing and to ensure both cost and energy efficient heating solutions are installed. Heating a home needs to be affordable in every community.

There need to be affordable housing options in every community. Housing is a significant component of our high northern cost of living and we need a territory wide approach to having affordable housing. Internally, there needs to be a strategy and progress on providing affordable, quality housing options for vital community staff such as teachers and nurses. When teachers and nurses move to a community need to have appropriate housing options for them and their families. This is a serious issue that needs immediate progress rather than just paper plans.

As well, the GNWT should take an active role in sharing best practices for cold climate construction standards with other jurisdictions in the Circumpolar region. We aren't the only region facing these challenges and we need to work with others than have had successes.

Healthcare – Healthcare in the NWT is an important issue that attracts significant attention. The challenges we face are unlike most regions in Canada, with our spread out population and expensive travel costs. We need to reinforce Stanton's role as the primary institution of our Northern healthcare system but also improve links to regional and community health centres and southern specialists. An integrated care system is especially important for the NWT as we can't always have every resource available in every location.

There is a significant cost to our system from medical travel, both in terms of fixed dollars but also in terms of quality of life. For residents to have to wait for appointments and leave loved ones behind can add a number of stresses when there are already potential medical issues. We need to improve our territorial infrastructure so that individuals can have more appointments faster and without all of the necessary travel. The cost savings in medical travel and improved quality of life would be of significant benefit to all of us. Other jurisdictions in North America have invested significantly in this capacity with great results.

To properly measure our healthcare system we need to establish and report on “holistic” benchmark standards of care, including wait times, so that we can measure performance against other institutions and jurisdictions. Have benchmarks and metrics will enable us to better measure and improve upon our medical system. In jurisdictions across Canada healthcare costs have become uncontrollable and take away from their ability to invest in education, and social programs. We have to continue keeping our costs in check, being accountable and, rather than simply throwing more money at the problem, find ways to spend our money smarter. Our healthcare professionals, both front line and administrative, have significant expertise in this area and we need to work with them on developing ideas so we can deliver the best care anywhere in Canada.

Devolution – I support a Devolution Agreement that will make MLAs, who are accountable to NWT residents, to accept responsibilities for developing the economy and to the make long term choices to create a positive investment climate, provide for economic diversification and to build capacity among our residents and communities. Our current funding formula which is based on historical municipal-provincial expenditures and population numbers contributes to short term thinking. Decisions are made by as much as by looking in the rear view mirror as in determining future needs. A devolution agreement that encourages legislators to look past current circumstances and to make informed choices for the future will promote discussion that builds an acceptable balance between conservation and building an economy to meet the needs our people.

There are some risks involved, but I believe Northerners are ready. We don't need Ottawa bureaucrats to decide on fiscal priorities or how our resources are developed. Devolution is only one tool in the toolbox but it is an important one. Negotiations must occur in parallel with the implementation of strategies that address other federally imposed constraints, such as the federal cap on borrowings, and limitations in accessing the full slate of federal/provincial industrial programs.

We only need to look ten to fifteen years in the future and ask ourselves whether we are prepared for an economy after diamonds. We need to plan for and determine what investments need to be made in training and infrastructure to make the NWT attractive to investors. We will need to make investments to reduce our dependency on oil; in telecommunications infrastructure; in road and marine infrastructure; and in leading research to allow us a meaningful role among circumpolar regions. These investments will only happen if we have the necessary tools to work with.

Will you go public with your choice of Premier and cabinet?

Yes, I would be willing to go public with my choice for Premier.