

Address to the NWT Chamber of Commerce

Premier Floyd K. Roland
Friday, November 13, 2009
NWT Chamber of Commerce

Good afternoon – thank you for the invitation to join you. It is a privilege and an honour – not only to speak today - but to do so alongside Senator Sibbeston. Let me begin by congratulating the NWT Chamber on the success that you have had communicating our message... about the economic potential and capacity of Canada's Northwest Territories so clearly and effectively at the national level.

It is the same message that I have been carrying to my provincial and federal colleagues in the South for a number of years.

The motion ratified by the Canadian Chamber in October is a testament to your work and will certainly serve to shape our collective lobby efforts in Ottawa moving forward.

I was pleased to hear from Mr. Curran that subjects such as: • enhancing Canada's Arctic sovereignty, • the need for nation-building investments in Northern infrastructure, • creating sustainable economic development opportunities, • maximizing Aboriginal participation at all levels of the economy, • and developing clean energy sources

Were such high priorities for all of the delegates that were in attendance at the AGM in Victoria.

In large part, the statements and positions taken by the Canadian Chamber also echo those of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources – of which Mr. Sibbeston is a member.

Their report to the federal government in May strongly suggested that.... Ottawa should be engaging the people that live in Canada's North before making decisions on a variety of issues that concern us.

I thank the Senator again today for his work and role with committee... Certainly the report that you produced has articulated the need to address some of the key issues that we are facing here in the NWT:

- The need to deal with climate change
- The need to strengthen infrastructure – specifically to advance the MGP and some of our alternative energy initiatives;
- The need for more comprehensive northern-based research; and

- The need to simplify governance – to cut through red tape – come to terms on a regulatory framework and to - once and for all – address the issue of resource ownership in the Northwest Territories.

These subjects are not new. In fact, they were also foremost in our discussions as a Legislative Assembly in 2007 when we identified the goals and priorities that would define our term as a Government.

They are implicit in our vision of: “Strong individuals families and communities sharing the benefits and responsibilities of a unified environmentally sustainable and prosperous Northwest Territories.”

Each of you in this room is infinitely aware that a vision or dream is one thing – but a solid fiscally-realistic business plan is, perhaps, more important. So – while we have identified and initiated over 140 initiatives, ideas and investments to advance the stated goals and priorities of our Assembly, our work as Government has also included some difficult and important steps to secure a footing from which we can realistically address our future.

For instance: We have implemented changes to our Government’s capital planning process - to improve the planning, acquisition and delivery of infrastructure – last week, we advanced the largest single year capital budget in the history of the NWT.

We have maintained a tight control on our costs. Spending growth has been held to 2 per cent. Our budget process has been more controlled, planned and accountable.

We have committed and leveraged an unprecedented amount of federal economic stimulus investment. During a period that has been challenged by the difficult and emotional task of putting our financial house in order, the economic realities of a global recession and the need to address critical issues such as H1N1 we have advanced pivotal initiatives such as the water strategy, Land Use Framework and the Species at Risk Act. But as important as the work itself, is the manner in which we have addressed it.

Community Governments are playing an increased role in targeting the priorities and investments in their communities.

Northern and Aboriginally-owned companies are playing increasingly key roles in the advancement of major infrastructure initiatives such as the Taltson Hydro facility, the Kakisa Bridge, health centres, hospitals, schools and the investments that we have made in the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road Bridges Program.

In fact, at a time when Canada’s economy has slowed due to the international recession, our Capital Plan has provided significant investment in the NWT – and substantial employment and contract opportunities for our residents and businesses.

A CBC news story from Trout Lake last week – highlighted the challenges that the community is having - finding enough people to complete the number of projects that are taking place. In everything that we have done – the initiatives - the investments – and the manner in which we have chosen to implement and advance our work – we have maintained a view to building our future – our people – our leaders – our businesses – and our communities.

Last month, the 16th Assembly marked the halfway point of our term as Government. I reiterated to my colleagues that this cannot be an excuse to look back or slow down.

Nor should this be the time to speed things up – and to rush initiatives in a misguided need to leave a legacy of our time in office. Instead, our half way mark has provided a point of confirmation – renewed mandate – and an opportunity to look forward – and to build even higher on what we have put in place.

It is my assertion that this Government is destined to put in place many of the resources, tools and processes that will allow us to realize some of biggest opportunities that have ever existed here in the NWT.

This brings me back to the four policies that you as a Chamber have championed in the interest of advancing economic development in the NWT.

We are in a position to establish a new and sustainable energy sector in our Territory - one which will respond to a growing international demand for our clean, secure and cost-effective energy supply and power the NWT forward as one of the most important economic engines of the nation.

I believe that in the next two years we can achieve the conditions necessary to allow the Proponents of the MGP to make their decision to construct – and move forward with the Mackenzie Gas Project.

In the next two years, I believe that we can have all of the necessary agreements in place to begin construction of the Taltson Hydro Expansion Project.

Earlier this summer, the federal government announced it's funding for the project description report for an all-weather road from Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk. That work is now underway. The report will pull together the information that is needed to receive community support and regulatory approval and to plan construction of the highway.

I believe that, in the next two years, we can leverage enough funding to put in place a project description report for the entire length of the Mackenzie Valley from Wrigley to the Dempster Highway.

Through processes such as our Regional Aboriginal Leaders Meetings and our leader's forum on political development, we are receiving input and guidance for our Government – and forging stronger relationships with our Aboriginal Governments –

and NWT leaders at a number of levels. I believe that we can build on these relationships and those that we have built with the Harper Government to sign an Agreement in Principle on Devolution.

I also believe that we can work as northern leaders to identify a political forum that will eventually allow NWT leaders to speak – together - on matters that concern our Territory and in doing so ensure decisions about our issues – about our people and about our North are made in the NWT by NWT residents.

The North and the Arctic have never before had such profile nationally and internationally. No one can deny that the challenges and opportunities that we are dealing with have garnered the attention of Canadian and international audiences. Our challenge is no longer how to get on the national and international agenda, but – rather - to ensure that our voices and interests are heard and recognized - not dismissed or overshadowed by the opinion, commentary or even aspersions of those who do not live here.

I suspect that the Senator will relate to the mixed feelings I had in June when I participated in Ottawa in the formal announcement of the Expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve. While it was a dramatic and visible commitment to the protection and importance of the land and environment that is so closely tied to the traditions and cultures of our Territory's residents, the difficult process leading up to the announcement highlighted to all of us the importance and need for a collaborative northern process to manage lands in the Northwest Territories.

As the future custodians and caretakers of the Northwest Territories, the Governments and people of the NWT must play a role in decisions concerning the future. As the leaders of those governments, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we can work together to ensure that the voices and interests of NWT residents are heard.

As you have demonstrated as a Chamber, we are stronger and more effective advocates for northern people and their interests when we can speak and act collectively. A unified Northern voice is more successful in garnering the attention and understanding of decision makers in our federal government, internationally and elsewhere.

In conclusion this morning, I would like to thank you formally – as members of the NWT Chamber – for your continued work and commitment in the interest of our Territory's businesses community.

As we continue to move forward, we will always welcome your insight and guidance in the development of programs and initiatives that will be relevant to our territory's business community and will effectively advance economic development in our regions and communities.

Collectively, our goal is the same – a strong and independent Territory made up of 33 economically vibrant and self-sustaining communities – full of healthy, educated families that have the opportunities and resources to make meaningful choices about their lives and future.